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Riotous community:

the crowd, politics and society in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Wales

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Historians of early modern Wales have, since the Second World War, dramatically expanded our understanding of this period. However, they have tended to concentrate on a limited number of topics: the activities of the ruling classes and, especially in the later part of the period, a variety of ‘awakenings’ – religious, national-cultural, industrial and class-politics. The story of the common people of Wales in the century or more before industrialization has been, in the main, one of lack, hardship and suffering.¹ Without doubt, their lives were tremendously precarious, difficult and often short: this is not Merrie Wales. What needs to be questioned is the resulting impression of a downtrodden population waiting passively to be rescued from ignorance and immorality by class-awareness and the chapel. It is difficult to uncover their thoughts, their beliefs and how these translated into actions. The evidence exists in scattered fragments recorded by others, observers who were often hostile to what they saw. Alternatively, and just as problematic, there are nostalgic, romanticized accounts of a disappearing world. Yet in recent years, historians working with these types of awkward, opaque materials have transformed our understanding of the mental worlds of the ‘lower orders’, in all their variety, in early modern Europe. This paper is intended to draw attention to the possibilities for Welsh history, so far largely neglected, through a preliminary examination of public mass gatherings – ‘crowds’ – from around 1700 to 1840.²

Further, this paper will represent a response to Keith Wrightson’s ‘incitement to riot’ against ‘the enclosure of social history’.³ Its targets are in fact three-fold: the fences erected between different types of crowd activity, those between social and political history – and the barricade apparently constructed along the Welsh-English border. As Linda Colley has pointed out: ‘Much of what passes as British history has been written only from the papers and perspectives of the English; and the resurgence of Celtic nationalism since the 1950s has tended to complement rather than reverse this parochialism’. Of course there were differences; there were also many similarities, part of a wider European social and economic setting. Neil Evans has argued for a British history ‘constructed from the building-blocks of regional and national distinctiveness within the British state’ which ‘needs to be fashioned from below and to work up to an understanding of the state’. The challenge is to write histories sensitive to differences, inequalities *and* affinities.⁴

Historians writing on ‘politics’ have long privileged ‘modern’ characteristics, centrally organized formal institutions such as state governments or trade unions. This has led not only to the neglect of the informal, the small-scale, the ‘peripheral’ (and the relations between so-called centres and peripheries), but also a failure to recognize different historical understandings of what represented

political activities, and what was expected of those in positions of official authority. The ‘ordinary’ people who participated in crowd activities in eighteenth century Wales had no written manifesto, no ‘party’ organisation, but that does not mean they had no *politics*: they inscribed their opinions and expectations, their ideas of what was just and moral and how things should be ordered, in dramatic, aggressive, collective action. And they could not be ignored.

Moreover, their actions undermine modern distinctions between ‘conservative’ and ‘radical’: whether criticizing or allying with the representatives of official power, they were upholding *their own* complex system of values. Their festivals and customs provided many of the ‘repertoires’ of the angry crowd action, and structured and expressed relationships within and between local communities: the creation of internal solidarities was vital for collective action on the ‘public’ stage. ‘Riotousness’ was fluid, multi-faceted, sometimes topsy-turvy; often combative, cruel, violent; crude, noisy, boisterous. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Wales was full of riotous gatherings with many potential purposes: play, work, fighting, censure, sharing, intimidation, celebration. But they were coming under increasing pressure from a whole range of ‘modernizing’ influences.

* * *

In recent decades, historians have rehabilitated ‘the crowd’ as a valid historical subject, destroying stereotyped images of destructive, criminal ‘rabblés’ and ‘mobs’ by showing the legitimating beliefs that lay behind crowd action and its often ritualised, disciplined character – and its public influence.⁵ However, as Robert Holton points out, these studies have tended to ‘conceive of crowd study almost exclusively in terms of social protest’. He suggests a broader definition, ‘collective assembly in the streets or some other public place’. Mark Harrison has also emphasized the complexity of the influences on people gathered as crowds. The context for riot does not consist only of other riots: recent studies ‘point to a continuous chain of action, belief, aggression and violence which extends from the rituals of the festival calendar right through to officially sanctioned massacres’.⁶

Hence, a wide range of activities will be outlined here: Christmas mumming and doleing customs, and other calendar-based festivities; football matches and *gwylmabsantau*; the *ceffyl pren* and other community sanctions; election riots and celebrations; or, indeed, hundreds of angry men, women and children seizing ‘hoards’ of corn, breaking into a warehouse, intimidating farmers and middlemen, destroying enclosures – or, similarly, attacking chapels, stoning Methodists, burning effigies of Tom Paine. A varied list: yet it will be argued that they are intimately connected. It is not that they were all ‘riots’ (in the legal sense) or even potentially so, but they do share, in varying degrees, ‘riotous’ features: public collectivity, the assertion of social expectations, a sense of unpredictability and sometimes anger or violence, tempered by some kind of ritualised framework. Moreover, contemporary usage of the term ‘riot’ could be highly inclusive. William Thomas, diarist and schoolteacher of Michaelston-super-Ely, used it pejoratively for a range of activities including

criminal offences, horse races and parish festivals.⁷ It is not necessary to share his puritanical hostility to recognise that, as a shrewd observer and long-term inhabitant of his village, he may have understood that something important linked these activities.

Welsh communities in the eighteenth century, however remote geographically, did not exist in isolation; apart from intense (and sometimes brutally expressed) local rivalries, they were connected to national and even international markets as producers and consumers, to central government and to a wider European cultural framework. 'Community' is often used to evoke a nostalgically-imagined harmonious (and rather isolated) stability, set against the divisiveness of class antagonisms and anonymous, mobile, large-scale urban societies. The historical rediscovery of 'the crowd' has also tended to involve assuming 'its' unity, and that of 'the community' from which crowds were drawn.⁸ But 'community' was not something that just happened 'naturally' because it took place on a small scale, primarily organized around informal, face-to-face relations: it had to be *made*, and public collective rituals were vital to that process. It was as much a matter of subjective, 'imagined' identity as objective features (such as geographical boundaries, remoteness, or locally-based systems of administration). Indeed, some customary rituals, such as that of 'beating the bounds' of a parish, fused the objective and subjective components of community boundaries. Importantly, the 'symbolic construction' of community identity depended on both belonging *and* exclusion, and because of their subjective dimension, these boundaries could be manipulated to suit circumstances: to enable alliances with those usually viewed as rivals, or to exclude a perceived threat from 'within'.⁹

Certain developments related to outside connections might be seen as particularly significant for local relations and 'boundaries'. One relates to changes amongst Welsh society's established leaders, the gentry, and in their relationship to an increasingly centralized, English-dominated, State. As landowners, many were becoming increasingly commercially minded, changes in attitude closely related to the trend towards building up large estates in a few powerful hands, which had begun well before 1700. In the eighteenth century, this was exacerbated by the failure of male heirs in many old families; many established estates passed (via marriage or sale) into unfamiliar, often English hands, absentees interested only in their new acquisitions for their income potential. And the surviving Welsh families were increasingly attracted to English centres of 'civilized' society and power. As they became more distanced, they also turned their backs on the riotous community traditions in which they had previously participated, part of the wider 'withdrawal of the upper classes' from previously shared popular cultures in early modern Europe.¹⁰ Philip Jenkins argues that in Glamorgan relationships between upper and lower orders were becoming increasingly strained from the 1720s. Similar developments have been traced in south west Wales and in Montgomeryshire, if not at such an early date.¹¹ David Howell suggests, in more general terms, that the 1770s were the critical decade 'as the old paternalism gave way to a new business-like outlook on the part of the gentry'; but, as he points out, generosity and sympathy were far from dead by the nineteenth century.¹²

A second factor to consider is the emergence of a significant ‘middling’ group from the commercial interests (merchants, substantial farmers producing for export, etc.) within ‘traditional’ communities. At the beginning of the period, their numbers were small, their situation was marginal, and at times of crisis they were (with, for example, religious dissenters) liable to find themselves targeted as the enemies ‘within’, to be judged – and punished. The growing prosperity and aspirations of this group, as they profited from growing demand and rising food prices, also made them less than popular with the landed gentry.¹³ And yet, despite the tensions, the economic interests of the commercial middling sorts and the gentry were rapidly converging, especially from around the mid-eighteenth century; and the two groups, whatever their differences, were coming to share many attitudes – including hostility towards the impudent and ‘uncivilized’ crowd. A number of social boundaries were being redrawn, ultimately working to isolate and marginalize riotous crowds and their politics.

It was, though, a long-drawn-out process: the strengths of the riotous community saw to that. Nor was there some deeply significant, sudden rupture at the turn of the eighteenth century, before which there was no conflict or change. It is important to recognize that in much of Wales there were many continuities from at least the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, or even longer. ‘Custom is tenacious’, as Gareth Williams has pointed out. But it would be a mistake to infer from that a state of immobility. ‘Traditional is not a synonym for unchanging’.¹⁴ Changes were always taking place, if only slowly. There were the never-ending, tiny shifts as people adapted to survive the unpredictable seasonal fluctuations and the ups-and-downs of both the calendar year and the individual life-cycle, in a land endowed with few surpluses to cushion its people against disaster.¹⁵ These may belong to no ‘great’ historical transformation, but they profoundly influenced social structures and relationships; the riotous community provided essential resources that helped people to cope with these strains.

In these riotous communities and in their customs, individuals came together in co-operation, their basic source of strength in the face of a difficult environment and scarce financial resources – but not necessarily an easy state of affairs. The members of a community interacted and struggled to reconcile competing differences; sharing in the benefits of belonging, it should be emphasized, also meant paying the community’s ‘dues’, upholding its interests and values, and its hierarchies. Failure to do so might well incur brutal, humiliating censure. A letter written by Lewis Morris in August 1760 hints at the mixed feelings that could arise, even among those who accepted the terms of membership: ‘I may perhaps have 40 or 50 neighbours here to assist in reaping, and drinking of ale.... But for reaping all other corn we pay dear enough, and this does not come cheap, for we must help those that help us’.¹⁶ And for those who benefited from the changes of the eighteenth century, the constraints imposed by traditions of communal assistance were increasingly irritating and irrelevant.

Many community activities involved ‘unruly’ gatherings of people in public spaces, the communal sharing of local resources (people, food, drink, money), ritualised confrontations and carnivalesque disguises and inversions. These customs – even the most apparently innocuous – can provide an important way into ‘understanding the structure of society and its tensions and conflicts’.¹⁷ For example,

doleing customs occupied a prominent place in the Welsh festive calendar; they may suggest the possible tensions, and changing attitudes towards the politics of co-operation. In the early nineteenth century, the writer John Evans recorded Christmas and New Year customs in south Wales. With ‘a company of idle people’, persons dressed up as a horse or a bull ‘enter the house of respectable people, neighing or bellowing in a hideous manner, and committing other acts of rudeness, to the great terror or annoyance of the inhabitants, who generally by a gratuity of viands and money, purchase their deliverance from these invaders of their peace’. A Glamorgan account, of roughly the same date, views it rather differently: ‘the common people go about with their Clothes fantastically ornamented to the houses of their superiors who upon this occasion treat them with ale and good cheer’, and ‘the young farmers, both men and maids... go about to their neighbours houses, disguised in each others clothes, and sometimes in masks.... They act various antic diversions and dance and sing: for which they get good cheer’.¹⁸ Good cheer or deliverance from invasion? The more affluent groups in Welsh society, who played such an important role in maintaining many festival customs, were growing increasingly ambivalent or even hostile towards these demands. A correspondent wrote to Lord Newborough in January 1793, hoping that he and his family had kept up ‘the festivities of the season... with the true spirit of antient times. It is a laudable custom to retain them’. The writer’s slightly anxious tone, like the hostility of John Evans, reminds us that such customs could not be taken for granted, and were often in decline: ‘It was usual a few years ago for the poor, men, women and children, on the morning of All Souls Day, to go round the houses of the Gentry, and the opulent farmers, to receive the bread that was then distributed... but this custom (at least in the neighbourhood of towns) has almost entirely vanished’.¹⁹

Large-scale rowdy activities, in particular, could be viewed as dangerous, a threat to law and order and to private property. In 1788, the Corporation of Pembroke attempted to suppress the annual Shrove Tuesday football match played in the streets of the town, as a ‘Source of much discord & public Tumult and doth greatly annoy and molest the Inhabitants... in the peaceable and quiet Enjoyment of their Houses’. The football players ignored this command from above and went ahead (to the detriment of a number of the residents’ windows) taking little notice even of the reading of the Riot Act.²⁰

The assertiveness shown by many practitioners of riotous customs, even those that could not in themselves be a serious threat to public order, could be worrying to their social superiors, a sign of dangerous insubordination. Writing on the custom of Easter ‘lifting’ (popular in counties on both sides of the border), Peter Roberts commented: ‘A little resistance, real or affected, creates no small merriment; much resistance would excite contempt, and perhaps indignation’. The newly arrived Wesleyan minister to the Wrexham circuit in 1842 was not inclined to be so indulgent. ‘Some females of the lower order go through the streets carrying a chair, and when they meet a man, lay hold of him, *nolens volens*, place him in the chair, and lift him up and then demand money of him’. He described it as a ‘relic of Popery’; he was clearly also outraged at such presumptuous, disorderly behaviour by ‘females’ of the ‘lower order’.²¹

Carnavalesque inversions were common features of eighteenth-century Welsh community customs: bizarre costumes, disguises and cross-dressing, mock elections, trials and confrontations. It has been argued that rituals of confrontation and status reversal could function as ‘safety valves’ for social tensions in a hierarchical society, ‘a means for the subordinates to purge their resentments and to compensate for their frustrations’ in a ritualised and thus controlled way. But when the ‘low’ rose to confront and castigate their rulers, they might well appropriate the carnival imagery of the ‘world turned upside down’ to politically disturbing uses.²² Alternatively, where a ritual event represented a ‘symbolic’ expression of serious underlying social tensions and antagonisms, the chances of disorder and violence could be particularly high.

Richard Suggett has recently traced such a relationship between festivals and the social structure in early modern Wales, through the history of the *gwylmabsant* and related customs. He shows that what has often been characterized as an ancient and progressively declining ‘survival’ of parish wakes ‘actually reveals a history of discontinuities’. They reached the height of their popularity during the eighteenth century as a symbolic expression of competitive relationships between parishes in the era of autonomous poor relief, with growing population and poverty placing considerable pressure on parish finances.²³ For many passing tourists and nineteenth-century recorders, the festival represented ‘the values of a departed village community whose harmonious relationships had been destroyed by social changes’. In late nineteenth-century reminiscences, they were ‘healthy, spontaneous, and full of [a] heartfelt sense of enjoyment, when all classes had opportunities to meet fraternally their neighbours and friends’. Eighteenth-century English tourists, it might be noted, created remarkably similar images. A visitor to Llandrindod Wells in 1746 found a nearby wake at Dysart ‘whimsically odd’, with young people playing tennis and fives in the churchyard, music and dancing, ‘a merry noisy Throng’. Another, from London, staying at Llanbeder in Breconshire in 1807, wrote of how ‘the mantling bliss of Cwrw, is cheerfully pledged, and every happy soul is exhilarated by the music of the Viol & the Harp.’²⁴

This was indeed the ideal, but the *mabsant* was often marked by disputes and battles – especially rivalries between parishes. Some descriptions *were* less romantic, criticising the excesses of food and drink, the irreverence, and the fighting. Edward Pugh, writing in 1816, recalled ‘scenes of barbarity and disgrace’ at north Wales wakes thirty years earlier. ‘The young men of the surrounding parishes would assemble all their force, and visit the wake’, and after a day’s drinking ‘the men of the parish would easily be provoked to quarrel with those of another’, using ‘clubs, sticks and stones, in a most furious manner’. Even worse, women would ‘enter the list in defence of their brothers’. Another form of ritualised ferocity marking parochial rivalries was played out through violent sporting contests – football, bandy, wrestling, which were often part of wakes or other festive occasions. Even the more romantic accounts cannot disguise that these were often brutal battles (especially as in many cases their principal participants were young men, no doubt concerned as much with personal reputation as with parish honour).²⁵

And sometimes the consequences could be fatal. At Henllan, Denbighshire in 1754, such inter-parochial antagonisms seem to have been exacerbated by those between ‘Welsh’ and ‘English’ (English-speakers?), ‘country’ and ‘town’. The revellers included villagers (the ‘Welsh Country People’) and visitors, townspeople from Denbigh, in company with a group described as ‘Factory People’ or the ‘English’. It was the end of the day, when everyone was beginning to go home and many had without doubt had a good deal to drink. One of them was John Foulke, the local blacksmith, who was clearly bitterly hostile and aggressive towards the outsiders. He told his drinking companion that ‘he had been often beaten and he would be beat before he went from that place’ and spent some time staring at the ‘factory’ people. Another witness heard him ask ‘which of Mr Mortymer’s Scribblers was the Champion of Denbigh’, and when a man was pointed out to him, he said, ‘*Myn Diawl myfi ai Champia fo* [By the devil, I’ll give *him* champion!]’. His actions almost certainly sparked off the fighting, which rapidly became a vicious, bloody battle between ‘Henllan’ and ‘Denbigh’, with sticks torn from hedges, and stones. John Foulke – who, at one point, was proudly showing off his battle-wounds – was fatally injured and died a few hours later.²⁶

It is quite possible that much of the day at Henllan had been agreeable and sociable; it could only serve to highlight the way that violence is inextricable from this cultural landscape. It is not simply that physical violence was ritual ‘gone wrong’, out of control. In the context of the charivari, it has been argued that ‘violence, threatened or actual, signalled one possible course which the ritual process of charivari might take, rather than a breakdown in its ritual control’.²⁷ It could be a response to a challenge to the crowd’s actions; food riots, for example, worked primarily through largely symbolic threats and intimidation, but this was effective only if it was understood that the threat was not just an empty gesture. Meanwhile, battles between parishes reflected the intensity of their rivalries and helped to enhance solidarities *within* neighbourhoods; but they could exact a terrible price. The fate of John Foulke should stand as a bloody warning against sentimentality: physical violence in this society was a vital source of strength that we need to try to understand, and yet a dangerous, life-taking force.

* * *

Many of the Welsh gentry in the early eighteenth century were still recognized leaders of their local communities, actively participating in riotous and violent behaviour – and in so doing sanctioning crowd politics. Disputes over land, including mining rights, frequently feature in records, often suggesting a complicated mix of tactics: civil litigation and criminal prosecution, and the ‘weapons’ of the crowd. Great Sessions records regularly contain ‘tit-for-tat’ accusations of riot/assault by members of the gentry: for example, in Flintshire in 1735, what looks like a pitched battle between two gentry families with their supporters, in Whitford parish church.²⁸ This is not a simplistic matter of powerful elites duping the ignorant into serving their interests: at many points ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ concerns could intersect. In Cardiganshire in 1731, a dispute over mineral rights at Cwmystwyth

lead-mines led to a violent incident that may serve as an example. Thomas Powell, squire of Nanteos and a magistrate, led a considerable number of his servants, tenants and neighbours to the entrance of the mine. Armed with ‘Blunderbusses, Gunns, Pistolls, Swordes, Staves and other Offensious Weapons’, they violently intimidated the unfortunate miners working there. Powell ‘pulled out his watch and declared that if [the miners] did not quitt the said Works in an hour they should be all dead then and that no Damage would ensue to any person that would kill them’. The crowd included a number of men who had been working the mine until dispossessed by the rivals: clearly, they would have been motivated by more than ‘deferential’ loyalty. They wanted their jobs back.²⁹ And Powell was no selfless philanthropist; this was a coincidence of interests, one that utilised a shared ‘language’ of collective violence. Even where the supporters of a riotous gentleman were not likely to be motivated by immediate self-interest (most of Powell’s followers had not just lost their jobs), he was recognized as an important local source of power and patronage: ‘deference’ represented a practical recognition of political realities.

In pursuing their rivalries, those in authority could frequently be seen to be using riotous methods themselves, or condoning such activities in others. In March 1729 two Cardiganshire JPs, Thomas Lewis and John Morgan, intervened in ‘a Riot and a Quarrel’ in the streets of Cardigan, arresting one of the leading participants, Charles Thomas John. However, on arriving at the Gaol, they found William Jones, deputy Mayor of the town, blocking their way; he charged them down and forcibly assisted John to escape. Then, supported by Jones, John ‘mounted himself on a Bench’ and brandished his stave in an ‘Out-Ragious and Riotous manner’ at the two JPs before rejoining the bloody battle. Later, Morgan expostulated with the deputy Mayor and received the revealing, distinctly unrefined response: ‘No Justice shall Intermeddle in my Corporation, I’ll wipe his Commission in my Backside’. Just to underline William Jones’ local status and authority, he is to be found elsewhere in this Sessions file: he sat alongside some of the two JPs’ colleagues, taking depositions from the victims and witnesses of yet another violent incident led by a riotous gentleman in Cardigan that summer.³⁰

So it is hardly surprising to find these gentlemen encouraging or even leading attacks on religious dissenters or political rivals. In 1715, Wrexham magistrates examined Edward Hughes, who had been involved in the destruction of the Presbyterian meeting house in July. He claimed that he and others had been encouraged and reassured by his then employer, John Puleston, gent., who had promised to protect him, and a Wrexham attorney, John Jones. Hughes presented his role in rather passive terms – as did many examnants in a similar situation³¹ – but accounts of the disturbances that had followed the Sacheverell judgement in March 1710 could give a rather different picture. On the night of 24 March, a crowd (estimated at 200-300 people) accompanied by drums and music marched through Wrexham, including an Edward Hughes – probably the same man – ‘carrying a Barrel or Firkin advanced upon a pole with burning fire blazing therein’ above their heads. They proceeded to break the windows of the meeting-house and of dissenters’ houses with sticks and stones. The next

morning, a witness heard a group that he identified as ringleaders promising to ‘Stand by each other’ and carry on the ‘work’ they had begun, with Hughes in particular ‘declareing himsele sorry he had not done more’. Clearly, he and his companions had strong opinions of their own and needed little encouragement. Sacheverell himself was to receive a rapturous welcome from all ranks of society when he visited Wrexham later that year.³²

Many of the Welsh gentry saw dissenters as the direct descendants of regicidal Puritans and Levellers, politically and socially subversive. Riotous communities may have felt more immediately threatened by the moral codes and religious practices of dissenting congregations living right on their doorsteps. As late as 1787, the Independent congregation at Llanfyllin (whose meeting house had also been destroyed by a crowd in 1715) faced crowd hostility and violence, probably following zealous efforts by the recently appointed minister against local customs including *mabsantau*.³³ The itinerant Methodist preacher, on the other hand, was seen as an arrogant intruder, an outsider with no right to attack their customs and values. Howell Harris made a point of preaching at ‘Revels’ and earned himself both harassment from magistrates and the fury of the crowd. ‘Mobs’ assaulted him, pelted him with stones and a variety of less dangerous but highly unpleasant objects: dirt, dung, eggs, fruit – and on one occasion, a dead dog. Magistrates certainly often encouraged them (actively or tacitly), but on at least one occasion displayed rather more restraint, when one rescued him from a crowd threatening to push him down a flight of stairs.³⁴

In the early decades of the century, political faction and religion remained closely connected around issues originating in the seventeenth century. Moreover, these could become enmeshed in intense local rivalries to produce violent confrontations that were neither confined to the upper orders nor to any single issue, notable in mid-Wales. In October 1716, a crowd shouting ‘Down with the rumps’, in which a local butcher and his sister played prominent roles, stoned the house of David Owens in Newtown. In Welshpool, the local barber headed a series of ‘Jacobite’ riots, on one occasion vowing to break an opponent’s bones (having already smashed his windows, twice) once King James was on the throne. Llanidloes in 1721-2 was the scene of several violent disturbances, an explosive mixture of adolescent arrogance, local feuding and party faction.³⁵ In 1755, Carmarthen was ‘full of fire, smoke and tumult’, put down to ‘the violence of party, and a dislike to the Jacobites’; and ‘tumult’ resurfaced repeatedly in struggles for control of that borough well into the nineteenth century.³⁶

Food riots, too, were often in some way linked to local faction feuding. It was not uncommon for suspicions to be voiced that ‘persons of figure and influence are always acting behind the scenes’, using mobs as their ‘tools’, as one correspondent from Carmarthen put it following food riots in 1757.³⁷ Such opinions may well hint at genuine connections. But why should we assume that manipulation worked only in one direction? Why should not the most ‘ignorant’ rioter be capable of realizing the usefulness of gentry support, or of exploiting gentry rivalries? Certainly, well into the eighteenth century gentry representatives of local authority in Wales – apart from the indirect

influence of their own riotous behaviour – often colluded with food rioters, sometimes in the context of their own rivalries, or their hostility towards the middle-men (with at least some genuine sympathy for the plight of the poor). This was hardly an expression of unequivocal approval; it probably reflects their confidence in their ability, in general, to control crowd politics – especially when many still practised the art themselves. It was in part a pragmatic acknowledgement of the crowd’s strength; appeasement and negotiation were sometimes more useful tactics than coercion. And it reflected the continuing two-way traffic in the processes of maintaining popular loyalty: for the ruling class to maintain their credibility and authority, they had to at least appear to live up to certain expectations.³⁸

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‘Food riot’, as historians have shown, covers a wide variety of sometimes highly organized actions, drawing upon community networks, customary values and a dramatic symbolic repertoire – ritualised displays of solidarity, blood-curdling threats, humiliation, symbolic acts of destruction and limited physical violence. As Charles Tilly has pointed out, because it related directly to two matters of tremendous concern to contemporary authorities, food supply and public order, the food riot was ‘a political event, an important one’. Only modern historians have relegated it to the status of ‘prepolitical’.³⁹ In terms of ‘community politics’, eighteenth-century food riots might usefully be viewed in two connected ways: firstly, as a form of community judgement during times of dearth on the middle-men, the hoarding farmers and exporting dealers; and, secondly, as a critique of authority for failing to act at a time of emergency. The ‘Generall Complaint of the Poor and Distressed’ in Swansea in 1766, addressed to ‘the Honnored Magistrates and Elders’, was directed against the farmers ‘who doth aske [so much] for the korn that We Can harly get Bread for our Starving familise’, the millers for charging exorbitant tolls, and maltsters, farmers and bakers for conspiring to keep grain out of the open market. It continued ominously: ‘Now Sirs We hope that Wisdom will teach You that have Authority to order these Things or Else we cannot Perrish without – Reveng’, and announced an intended meeting.⁴⁰ Direct violent action by riot was to be a last resort.

There were localized disturbances, associated with bad harvests, as early as the 1690s and in 1709 at Wrexham. In June 1728 a ‘great uproar’ took place at Beaumaris, Anglesey, against corn exports, which included a number of furious townswomen ‘armed with stones & broken glasses’. However, in 1740, food-supply disturbances broke out on an unprecedented scale, affecting several areas including Pembrokeshire and Merioneth and, most of all, Flintshire and Denbighshire.⁴¹ It has been suggested that there were distinctive types of food riot closely related to specific geographical circumstances: in particular, those blocking exports, associated with small towns and villages in producing areas and arising from beliefs that locals should be supplied before any surplus could be exported, and the (more sophisticated) price-fixing riot in larger towns and cities at times of shortage and high prices.⁴²

The north Wales disturbances of 1740 (and 1757-8) have something of a hybrid quality; they were primarily about preventing exports, but show many elements of *taxation populaire*. This was an area of growing urban and industrial activity within a largely agricultural population; as a region that was hardly a noted grain producer, this would already have been putting pressure on local corn supplies. Moreover, it was within the orbit of large urban & trading centres in north west England, major centres for both consumption and export. In a year as bad as 1740, then, there would have been intense competition for a very limited local supply.

The Flint disturbances began on 21 May, when a crowd of 400 men, women and children headed by Mostyn and Bychton colliers rioted at Rhuddlan and nearby areas. One merchant, George Colley, attempted to intervene against them and became one of their main targets: they seized his corn and other goods, smashed his windows and threatened to blow up his house, and to ‘Cutt his head off & sett [it] upon Dissarth Finger post & tie his guts abt itt’. On this occasion, Sir Thomas Mostyn was implicated in the disturbances: at the very least, he was remarkably unconcerned about the fact that his miners had obtained firearms from his house, bore his emblem and shouted ‘A Mostyn’ at Rhuddlan – where the voters happened to be supporters of his political rival, Sir George Wynne. It was alleged that ‘The Mob is encouraged and have money given them by Gentlemen about Holywell’. Colley suspected (and was not alone in this) that Mostyn’s agents were protecting Rhuddlan merchants with Mostyn connections. However, at least one of these soon received a visit from the rioters. Maybe Colley was wrong – or the agents concerned had simply underestimated the unruly independence and the anger of the rioters. The disturbances spread, to Dyserth, Prestatyn, Rhyl and Wrexham, where a pro-Myddelton crowd confronted Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, and only quietened with the arrival of troops.⁴³

Meanwhile in Denbighshire on 28 May a crowd from Denbigh, largely comprising artisans and labourers, set out for the village of Henllan with the expressed aim of preventing exports. One rioter later told magistrates that he and a colleague had been threatened and forced to take part, and that the leaders had claimed to be ‘impowered by a Warrant’ and ‘upbraided them with want of Duty to their Countrey and Blind to their own Interest’. In Henllan, they learnt of a store of wheat awaiting shipment from the house of John Edwards; they seized part of the stock and carted it to Denbigh. The following day, they sold off the corn after publicly proclaiming its price at the Market Cross, and divided the proceeds between themselves. A number of them spent the rest of the day in the Crown Inn, presumably to the satisfaction of the landlord, who had – apparently willingly – provided them with free food and ale before they set out for Henllan. In contrast, a crowd which targeted Edward Jones of Ddol, near Llanefydd, on 30 May helped themselves to food and drink and demanded money in compensation ‘for their losse of time and journey’ before carting away several sacks of wheat.

In the records, the events then begin to acquire a more menacing tone. David Price, a Llanefydd yeoman heard that ‘his dwelling House would be destroyed, and all his substance wasted by a Mob that was to come from Denbigh’, and the villagers ‘got together upon their Defence’. On the

following day, a 'large Party of the s[ai]d Rioters with Drums beating & armed with Guns Swords Hedge Hooks [and] Rakes' arrived, allegedly threatening to 'plunder, burn and destroy the Houses of the Inhabitants' and to 'kill all the people'. The two parties met on the highway, shots were fired, and a rioter fatally wounded William Davies, a labourer of Llanefydd. A running battle then developed, resulting in further serious injuries.⁴⁴ For all the threats and aggression, such violence by food rioters was a rarity, so why on this occasion? They had come up against a serious challenge: confronted, not by anonymous soldiers, but by an opposing riotous community, one viewed as an 'enemy', for its association with food exports. For their part, the Llanefydd villagers (gentry and yeomanry, labourers and craftsmen) united to act against this threat to their interests, their homes and lives. The incident is one that complicates the notion of the 'moral economy'. It was not simply a clash between the poor and the rich, or even the 'traditional' and the 'commercial': it also needs to be set in the context of the community rivalries analysed by Richard Suggett, and viewed alongside the discussion of events at Henllan, just a few miles away, in 1754.

To add to this varied and complex picture of 'food riot', further west in Merionethshire a more unusual method was employed. At Bala, on two consecutive market-days, people who had purchased corn were 'seized' on their way out of the town, brought before the 'Recorder', Charles Vaughan, and compelled to swear on oath that their purchases were for their personal use. Vaughan then issued them with 'tickets' for safe passage out of the town.⁴⁵ Maybe disputes over the food supply were relatively new to Welsh people in 1740: this clearly did not prevent them from coming up with sophisticated methods, creatively appropriating the methods and language of officialdom as well as those of 'popular' custom, in the defence of their interests.

In 1756-8, disturbances spread across a total of thirty counties in England and Wales. In Wales, the rioting seems to have been especially severe in the north-western counties, in the early months of both 1757 and 1758. On 8 February 1757, a crowd at Newborough, Anglesey, seized a large quantity of butter and cheese, which its owner appears to have been trying to remove rather surreptitiously, after 'Mr Beaver held a court in and for the corporation of Newburgh and there declared that no corn or butter can be carryd' out of the county, telling those present that 'you are fools if you suffer butter to be carryd away'. The local bailiff was prominently involved; the butter was taken to his house for storage. A year later, William Bulkely wrote in his diary, 'Mobbing has been so frequent this winter in this countrey and several ship loads of Corn, butter and cheese have been publickly stolen and carryed away, and the greatest part of it never sold at all and what was sold was next to nothing'. Again, official authority played a role in this; the justices 'are greatly suspected to encourage and set them on', regularly summoning farmers and merchants to Beaumaris Shire Hall 'at the peril of their lives from a mob of 200 to 300, who fill the hall'. Those summoned suffered both a bullying inquisition from the bench and the 'insult and abuse' of the crowd before being 'convicted and unmercifully fined'.⁴⁶ During the winter of 1766-7 in south Wales, another disturbed year, justices showed similar sympathies, passing regulations to stop 'Jobbers about the Country that buys Corn to

sell it at Bristol under hand', and they 'put down' a considerable number of the 'Jobbers'.⁴⁷ In so doing, they may have helped to prevent the kind of serious disturbances that erupted in parts of England that year.

The next period of serious disturbances came between 1793 and 1801, and has previously been investigated in some detail by David Jones. In some ways, as he points out, these disturbances were 'remarkable only because they were so numerous'.⁴⁸ They shared the same basic causes as earlier food riots: bad harvests and rising food prices and the suspicions of 'artificial scarcity', exacerbated by war conditions. But there are also considerable differences when the period is compared to the mid-eighteenth century. The attitude of those in authority had certainly changed. To be sure, gentry observers still complained that farmers were causing unrest by withholding supplies and that they 'would not be prevailed on until the people became tumultuous'.⁴⁹ But the recent rapid growth of Welsh urban populations could make food riots far more threatening affairs (as witnessed by the scale of the rioting in Merthyr Tydfil in 1800). And events across the English Channel undermined the earlier confidence of the ruling classes: in the increasingly panicky atmosphere of the decade, they were far less likely to collude in any 'tumultuous' activity that involved criticism of their behaviour.⁵⁰ The affluent, as individuals or through 'Corn Committees', regularly raised subscriptions to subsidize corn prices in efforts to prevent violent direct action; but when such disturbances did occur, their response was increasingly severe.⁵¹ They were far more likely to call out troops to suppress disturbances, and to side with the commercial interests of the prosperous farmers and the 'shopocracy'.

In Swansea in 1793, food rioters clearly still expected to be able to call on official support. On Saturday (market-day) 2 February and again two days later, crowds gathered and paid visits to houses where they believed corn was stock-piled, warning the occupants of the dire consequences of failing to bring their corn stocks to sell openly at the next market. A 'great number' of men, women and children, many from the copper works, marched on the house of William John of Llangyfelach, a farmer and maltster. They forced their way into the house, searched it and then made the trembling farmer accompany them to Swansea 'to appear before the Portreeve' at the Guildhall. They took an extremely circuitous route, passing several other copper works, shouting to everyone they passed that they had caught 'the Fox' and inviting them to join the procession, while frequently threatening to beat his brains out. Over the following days, the copper workers in the Swansea area also produced a number of threatening pamphlets and petitions for delivery to magistrates and employers, demanding both fair prices and decent wages with the sinister line: 'France is a warning'.⁵² The French Revolution provided a new dimension to repertoires of threat and intimidation, without necessarily meaning that food rioters ever intended to follow the sans-culottes' example.

Two periods, 1794-6 and 1800-1, produced the most widespread and sustained scenes of rebellion – and repression. Denbigh continued to be a centre for discontent: in April 1795, serious rioting broke out over food prices and conscription. At Mold, a crowd broke into 'the Warehouse of a man,

who buys corn in this Country for the use of Cheshire and Lancashire, and forced him to sell it to them at less than the market price'. But the crowd at Denbigh on 1 April turned its attention away from the usual scapegoats, to directly attack the magistrates. John Lloyd of Hafodunos and Wygfair, wrote that 'Some of the Ringleaders of the Mob threatened me bodily Hurt, & that they would pull down my Houses, stone by stone, as well as those of my Colleagues if we attempted to carry either of the lists into Execution'.⁵³ In August that year, a dramatic incident took place in Haverfordwest when a crowd of colliers, women and children armed with bludgeons marched down the high street shouting 'One and All - One and All'. They fled when the militia intervened, but not before one woman was heard to declare that 'in less Time than a Twelvemonth, she should see ye downfall of all ye Clergy & of every Rich Person'.⁵⁴ John Bird of Cardiff wrote in April 1801 that 'he had heard many of the lower Order call his Majesty a Dam German Butcher, That he delighted in blood, and that they would not be starved under such a *Whelp*'.⁵⁵ And in September 1800, in this atmosphere of anger and fear, Merthyr Tydfil erupted in disturbances involving over two thousand people and stretching over several days before order could be restored: the authorities responded with three sentences of death.

The judge's address when passing sentence, while expressing sympathy for the distress of the poor and criticism of local authority and employers, forcefully asserted the principles of the free market and private property, and voiced contemporary fears about the consequences of crowd politics in the light of the French example: government by 'incendiaries and rioters', 'the system of murder and rapine, which is the pestilence and scourge of countries, that are flaming with anarchy and rebellion, around us'.⁵⁶

* * *

There is, then, a clear sense of increasing tension and hostility and of a shift towards class divisions, at least in the industrialized districts of Wales, at the end of the eighteenth century. However, more attention needs to be paid to the activities of 'conservative' Welsh crowds.⁵⁷ There is indeed a world of difference between a crowd defiantly confronting authority – and its armed representatives – and one which is sponsored, or at least tolerated, by that authority for, say, a patriotic celebration. But to assume that the latter must have been orchestrated 'from above', ignorant and passively subservient, would be downright patronizing. Here, a few brief examples may be suggestive. Even before 1793, effigies of radicals were being burned in Welsh towns in the name of church and king. 'They laughed and burnt poor Tommy Paine/In seventeen ninety two' in Cardiff, sponsored by the Corporation; loyalist workmen in Merthyr wore boots with nails stamped in the pattern TP to trample him underfoot.⁵⁸ And the threat of invasion in Pembrokeshire in 1797 brought an overwhelming patriotic local response.⁵⁹

Election contests continued to be stormy, riotous affairs at times, as in Carmarthen in both 1796 and 1802 (the borough and county elections respectively). Both contests were accompanied by

violent incidents and followed by mass celebrations - processions, bonfires, the ringing of bells and firing cannon. In 1802, the sheer scale of the bills run up by the losing candidate – including the cost of thousands of meals, over 25,000 gallons of ale and 11,000 bottles of spirits – suggests that this was far from being an exclusive, elitist (or sober) affair.⁶⁰

The 1796 celebrations included townsmen drawing the victor's carriage through the town, a custom found in other contexts, and one that is inadequately comprehended if conceived in terms of 'deference'. On his return to Wales in 1792, after nine years' absence, Lord Newborough and his wife were enthusiastically welcomed at Caernarfon in a similar fashion: 'the horses were taken out of the carriage which was dragged to Glynllifon by 600 people "all friends and dependents of milord"'. The Newboroughs did not, one imagines, exercise too much choice or control over this. In 1830, the 'Inhabitants of Narberth' wrote to Baron de Rutzen requesting 'the honour of drawing your Lordship through the Town of Narberth – as hath been the Custom of time immemorial... Your Lordship submitting to this small token of the gratitude and pleasure of the People will fail not to impress with a lively sense of your Lordship's Urbanity'. They went on 'to inform your Lordship that as the people expect some token of remembrance from your Lordship', the event would conclude at the Castle Inn for the people to 'receive what your Lordship shall be pleased to direct'.⁶¹ The mix of deferential courtesy and assertive expectation is striking and perhaps suggestive of how Welsh riotous communities regarded 'paternalistic' relationships, well into the nineteenth century. And the same customary expectations underpinned rural communities' extremely *undeferal* actions against threats such as enclosure.

Examining rural enclosure disturbances raises other questions about both the established narrative of 'the making of the Welsh working class' and the concept of 'paternalism'. With Welsh evidence at least as early as the sixteenth century, these had a much longer history than food riots, considerably pre-dating industrialization and all its associations with 'class struggle'.⁶² And, perhaps even more than food rioting by town-dwellers and industrial workers, struggles over enclosures and related issues represented 'the radicalism of tradition', rather than any 'forward' looking class-consciousness. However, as Craig Calhoun has argued, 'when societies are rapidly changing, commitment to tradition can be a radical threat to the distribution of social power'.⁶³ David Jones has suggested that 'no Welsh county was more disturbed in the late 1810s than Cardiganshire'; the Rebecca riots, perhaps the most serious threat to official authority in nineteenth-century Wales, were also the offspring of such 'traditional' communities under severe pressure from modernising influences.⁶⁴

Disputes over enclosures occurred throughout the eighteenth century. During the 1710s, a series of enclosure disturbances occurred at Treleck, Monmouthshire. On Christmas day 1710, a substantial stretch of new fences enclosing local woodland was destroyed: when the sheriff was sent to seize villagers' cattle in compensation, on 16 May 1711, 'a great Company of People' assembled and marched through the village, with 'two old Women leading ye van, two fidders playing all ye way and Treleck Bells Ringing them in'. In spite of 'severe threats and promises of great rewards', the

neighbourhood kept up a stubborn resistance over the next three years, pulling down fences and even firing parts of the woods. A century later, enclosure of local waste lands elicited a similar response.⁶⁵ Similarly, disturbances at St Clears in Carmarthenshire in the early nineteenth century had their predecessors; in 1732 a dispute at Blanecorse between the portreeves and burgesses of St Clears (who appealed to Sir John Philipp for support) and David Scurlock, a farmer, was fought out both through the Court of King's Bench and by direct action, when about eighty people cut down his fences and his trees, making 'loud shouts, terrible Shrieks and Huzzaes'.⁶⁶ The area continued to be a centre of resistance to enclosures. 'God dam the Corporation', ran the anonymous notice posted at Carmarthen, probably about 1786, for enclosing local commons 'contrary to ye charter which is the right of the Poor'.⁶⁷

Again, such disturbances intensified in the 1790s as war and population growth stimulated agricultural production and growing numbers of parliamentary enclosures of Welsh commons and upland 'wastes'. A particularly well-organised and spectacular protest occurred at Hope, Flintshire, in 1793. On 20 April, Thomas Jones was arrested and imprisoned for his part in destroying new fences. The next day, Sunday, careful arrangements were made for his rescue. According to witnesses, these were largely organised by John Jones and Richard Roberts, a small farmer, who was said to have exclaimed 'that this was the time for the Country to rise and destroy the new Inclosures if they ever meant to have any benefit from the Commons'. On Monday morning, an estimated two to three hundred people assembled and marched to Flint Gaol to rescue Thomas Jones. They then proceeded homewards, tearing down and burning new fences. Roberts continued to play a prominent role in the accounts of witnesses, as did the forceful widow Anne Jones, who distributed bread, cheese and ale to participants at her home in Caergwrlle that evening. A number of those identified as ringleaders were prosecuted at the following Great Sessions, but pardoned the following year for fear of further trouble.⁶⁸

In the early nineteenth century, most enclosure disturbances occurred in west Wales, in remote upland areas that were difficult to police. A 'dreadful insurrection', according to a melodramatically inclined letter writer, broke out near Llanrhystud in Cardiganshire at some time between 1812 and 1815. A group of women wearing dripping-pans as cuirasses and 'armed with missile weapons of all descriptions' attacked the surveyor, seized his equipment and directed his attention 'to a pit which was dug for the internment of every surveyors that approached their sights'. At a later attempt to survey the land, 'like a rolling torrent the Amazons rushed down' to put a stop to it. Troops had to be summoned.⁶⁹ At Mynydd Bach, Cardiganshire, resistance to parliamentary enclosures went on for well over a decade, culminating in Rhyfel y Sais Bach (the 'war of the little Englishman') between 1820 and 1826 (which ended in a victory for the locals over the foreigner Augustus Brackenbury).⁷⁰

And enclosure continued to be a source of bitter conflict: between 1858 and 1869 local inhabitants vigorously opposed attempts to enclose common land in the Conway area, sending threatening letters, pulling down fences and burning buildings – resulting in the creation of a new police district. That

hardly sounds like peaceful rural harmony; nor do the Tithe Wars of the 1880s. During the nineteenth century, commentators constructed an influential image of peaceful, law-abiding Wales, especially its rural paternalistic communities: crime and conflict were allegedly caused by alien capitalists and immigrants, ‘who destroyed cultural integrity and community harmony’.⁷¹ Left-wing historians have often unconsciously echoed this model: they have also looked for ‘real’ political struggle in urban-industrial contexts, and among ‘revolutionary’ intellectuals and organizations. Conforming to neither view, the ‘reactionary radicals’ of rural Welsh communities have frequently been lost in a historiographical blind spot – even though the urban working-class was largely made up of migrants from those very communities.

* * *

Women have frequently appeared in these pages, and it is quite likely that their roles, too, have been understated in many of the sources (just as they have been neglected by many historians until recently), even though women in early modern Europe were definitely not supposed to order men about, still less to abuse and humiliate them. Writers used the ‘natural’ disorderliness of women to justify their legal subordination: the ‘lower ruled the higher within the woman... and if she were given her way, she would want to rule those above her’. However, in the ‘real’ world, an unruly woman was often viewed with some ambivalence; she might threaten patriarchal authority, but her vigour, assertiveness and initiative could be vital to a household’s survival. In customs and festivals, the recurring theme of ‘the woman on top’ reflected that ambivalence: whether directing events or their target (charivaris often involved the vigorous acting-out of the husband-beater’s actions in a style susceptible to ambiguous interpretation), she was often a powerful, dangerous figure. Natalie Davis has argued that this kind of ‘multivalent image’ could ‘sanction riot and political disobedience for both men and women’.⁷² Women in angry crowds were acting upon ‘their particular right, according to tradition and gender role, as guardians of the children, of the household, of the livelihood of the community’, to criticize incompetent government and to pass judgment on threats to those interests.⁷³ Their presence, indeed, underlines the local-community basis of popular politics during this period, in contrast to the later workplace-oriented, masculine, focus of trade-union politics, although the continuing, but ‘less public and evident strategies of protest closely linked to family and neighbourhood’ in modern labour struggles have frequently been overlooked by Welsh historians.⁷⁴

Even in the form of crowd action most associated with women, the food riot, they very rarely monopolise the scene.⁷⁵ These were *joint* actions, men, women and children playing complementary roles to protect shared interests. Many ‘official’ sources almost certainly understate the participation of both of the latter groups. Men completely dominate the Flint Great Sessions records of the 1740 food riots, even though letter-writers reported that early riots at Rhuddlan and St Asaph involved mixed crowds. A similar discrepancy occurs in the Anglesey gaol files for spring 1758. A witness to

a cheese riot at Redwharf stated that women were present in the crowd; but the corresponding indictment mentions no women at all; only a handful of women are named throughout the numerous indictments for riot in that file.⁷⁶ More research is needed; but it seems quite likely that women were under-represented in formal indictments for riot. It is difficult to say, however, whether this reflected different attitudes towards women rioters, or the different roles that men and women tended to play in the 'evolution' of a riot. The kind of individually prominent role that attracted the courts' attention, heading up and speaking for a crowd, or carrying swords or firearms, probably was more likely to be taken by men; and women who did get noticed and prosecuted do not seem to have been treated with particular leniency.⁷⁷

It also needs to be noted that one aspect of female participation was vitally important in mobilising crowd action, and yet not at all likely to receive attention from the highly selective legal process: that of forging the community's 'lines of communication and allegiance'.⁷⁸ Women's informal networks were forged through varied activities in a variety of places: 'gossiping informally in the streets, on doorsteps, at the village well or bakehouse'. Gossip, that much-maligned activity, 'enabled women to play a central role in the surveillance of community affairs'.⁷⁹ Their local knowledge, their vital contributions to household and community: these put them at the forefront of actions defending those interests.

Contemporary observers and witnesses frequently made clear the extent of the commitment and determination shown by Welsh women rioters; they employed to considerable effect the full repertoire of crowd actions (and, it should be noted, appeared in a wide range of types of action: they were certainly not confined to 'hunger' disturbances). Firstly, their words are often highlighted. At Newtown in October 1716, Thomas Gwynne attempted to intercede with the crowd attacking David Owens' house, which included a number of women. Gwynne confronted David Prichard, who was armed with a pitchfork and managed to wrestle it away from him. As he was returning to the house, he heard David's sister Elizabeth exclaim, 'Dam him [Gwynne] for a skip kennell Dog I wish it [ie, the pitchfork] were in his Gutts'. Lowry Roberts, a member of the crowd that stoned John Evans' house in Llanidloes in December 1721, was no less murderously inclined. After throwing stones through the windows with the others, she 'tould some of them, that she would bring fire and advised or proposed that they should get gun-powder to blow up the said house'; one of the men leading the crowd – who had himself been threatening the house's inhabitants with murder – had to dissuade her, saying that it was not necessary or 'p[ro]per'.⁸⁰

Often, women rioters' words were aimed at male allies whose commitment seemed to be less than whole-hearted. During the Hope enclosure disturbances in 1793, Anne Jones caught one young man, Peter Jones walking along the road with his hands in his pockets while the rest of the crowd vigorously tore down and destroyed fences. She upbraided him: 'Why don't you work like the rest, you are a lusty man and how can you be idler than the others, you shall have none of the Bread & Cheese & Ale, if you don't work'. This remarkable combination of sexual flattery (or sarcasm?), a

sharp scolding and the threat to withhold his reward, apparently sent him promptly back to ‘work’. The words of Catherine Robert Thomas Harry at the Llangyfelach house of William John in 1793 were more brutal, and perhaps intended equally for her colleagues and the trembling farmer. As the crowd were about to leave, she went up to the leading group with the farmer and said ‘Hear you Devilish Dogs you have done nothing yet, Down with it [ie, the house] every Stone’.⁸¹

Female rioters’ violence, though, was not confined to words. In the Beaumaris corn riots in 1728, one of the ‘furious’ townswomen ‘hitt Jack Hughes of Glan yr Afon upon the head that he bled very much’. At Haverfordwest in August 1795, a magistrate suffered similar treatment from one of the ‘perfect furies’.⁸² It was not always the preserve of lower-class women, either. Joan Allen, wife of John Allen of Jefferston (Pembrokeshire), was no delicate flower when it came to defending the family’s interests during a long-running dispute over ownership of a coalmine. At the Spring Great Sessions in 1743, she was convicted of assault (among several indictments of riot and/or assault against both sides in this and other gaol files). The Allens obtained a civil judgment in their favour, but that was not the end of the matter. When they caught their opponents carting away coal in April 1745, Joan ‘went and stood in the road... with a stone in her hand and threw it at ye Cattle which were drawing one of ye s[ai]d carts and stood directly in ye way and said that no one should drive that way’.⁸³ Throwing stones and other missiles (whether at buildings or people) was perhaps one of the most common methods employed by eighteenth-century Welsh crowds to display hostility and disapproval, and one frequently used by women. At Machynlleth (Montgomeryshire) in 1728, ‘a parcell of women’ pelted with stones a man who had viciously abused his wife as she lay in childbed, and was suspected of having then poisoned her.⁸⁴ The same treatment, as already noted, could be meted out to Methodist preachers. And in 1812, officials attempting to survey commons in the Llyn Peninsula encountered a similar expression of the local women’s wrath. They had already managed to quieten one (mixed) crowd when ‘a fresh set of women... came up who immediately abused the men for their supineness and commenced a salute of sods upon the Commissioner and the Surveyor’.

⁸⁵

As late as 1831, there were notable female presences in riots at Carmarthen and the Merthyr Rising.⁸⁶ But it is noticeable that after the Napoleonic Wars (and long before the growth of trade unionism) female involvement in Welsh popular politics becomes less prominent. Or, to be more precise, their *physical* involvement declines, while their symbolic role, the theme of men-dressed-as-women, culminating with Rebecca, comes to the fore. When men in nineteenth-century Welsh crowd protests dressed in female clothing, they borrowed the ambiguous symbolic power of the ‘woman on top’; but in the eighteenth century, powerful women had appeared in person, boldly and openly, to represent communities’ interests in co-operation with men. They now began to move into the background, lending vital support (and presumably, on these occasions, their clothing) rather than being visibly part of the action.

The increasing use of disguise and inversion is a notable feature of riotous community politics in Wales during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. For example, there was the *ceffyl pren* ('wooden horse'), closely connected as a form of community sanctions to the Rebecca riots. It was claimed to be an ancient custom, approved by Hywel Dda himself; yet the evidence so far uncovered for its existence before 1800 is extremely sparse, and not that common before the 1830s. Of course, more detailed study might produce more evidence, and in any case silence in the records does not mean that nothing occurred. But it does seem that in eighteenth-century Wales, elaborately 'charivaresque' sanctions were not very prominent.⁸⁷ In this period, as noted, pelting targets with a variety of missiles was the most common physical expression of Welsh community anger – a brutally direct action with its own quasi-Biblical symbolism. Replacing stones with less dangerous but nauseatingly unpleasant objects certainly added a grotesque topsy-turviness to proceedings; and crowd sanctions often included elements of festive ritual or ceremonial, the use of music, drums, fiddles or ringing church bells, parading victims in procession, the 'execution' of effigies.

So, eighteenth-century Welsh crowd actions clearly drew on themes of misrule; but the significance of custom for them seems to lie less in carnivalesque masquerade, reversal and disguise than in the assertion of expectations legitimated by 'tradition' and communal values. During much of the century, crowd actions were complex and contested, but possessed some degree of legitimacy as political activities where relations between 'low' and 'high' were marked as much by negotiation and collaboration as by protest and opposition. The members of communities acted in the certainty that the world (and the riotous gentry) was on their side. However, their right to judge and to act was increasingly being rejected by their governors, as the destructive subversiveness of the ignorant and presumptuous. Rebecca's use of disguise and reversal, highly disturbing to contemporary authorities, is also symbolic of the marginalized status of the riotous community, as their world was being turned upside down.

Ultimately, the changes could not be reversed; but they did not have to be meekly accepted, either. The riotous communities eventually, painfully, adapted and re-made themselves, finding new strengths, building on old ones. The enthusiastic adoption of rugby among the industrial communities of south Wales, for example, was hardly a slavish copying of English public-school standards; it surely owed something to riotous traditions of parochial football.⁸⁸ Historians of Welsh labour have frequently overlooked the continuing use of *ceffyl pren*-style community based tactics – in which women maintained key roles – into the twentieth century, often as a vital part of more formal 'modern' industrial disputes.⁸⁹ And as something of a postscript, in December 1997 furious Welsh beef farmers seized incoming lorry-loads of Irish beefburgers and deposited them (in front of television cameras) in the Menai Straits. The issues might have changed; the methods (with some updating to take account of modern media) and the motivating sense of injustice were remarkably familiar.

* * *

The *anterliwt* (interlude) was a highly popular form of Welsh dramatic expression, at its height during the second half of the eighteenth century. Often derided by ‘cultured’ contemporaries for its lack of literary merit, it has been sadly neglected since. The writers and players of the *anterliwt*, and its most enthusiastic (but not its only) audiences, came from the uneducated, riotous, impudent communities of Wales; the drama was improvised and unpolished in both its writing and performance, rude and ephemeral. And yet, especially in the hands of its self-taught master, Twm o’r Nant, it was a medium of tremendous vigour and biting satire; at least some representatives of authority feared its potential for disorder. It was peculiarly Welsh, and yet it had close European relatives, from medieval English interludes to the Italian *commedia dell’arte*.⁹⁰ It seems, then, an apt image for many of the themes in this paper. If ‘interlude’ in modern English suggests reflective calm, a lull between more notable activities, the *anterliwt* was not like that at all. It represents a troubled, dramatic era of upheaval, realignment, conflict, for all ranks of Welsh society, which we cannot understand by reference only to narrow (literate, wealthy, ‘polite’) sections, or by reference to Wales alone, any more than ‘Britain’ can be understood without its European context as well as its internal complexities. I have attempted to open up areas for discussion rather than to provide definitive answers: this paper has necessarily been a rapidly drawn sketch of a little-known landscape.⁹¹ We cannot easily comprehend the culture and the people I have discussed here. The riotous communities upset many modern values (just as they often upset more ‘civilized’ people in their own time) and raise questions about modern categories: they are neither class heroes nor passive forelock-tugging peasants. They were complex and vigorous people who lived through difficult, confusing, rapidly changing times; neglecting them, their experiences, their politics, has impoverished our histories, Welsh, English and British alike.

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¹ See, for example, two important recent textbooks covering the period, whose focus is clear from their titles: Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones (eds.), *The Remaking of Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 1988); Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales, 1642-1780* (Oxford, 1993). For a particularly bleak picture, see Brian Howells, 'Social and agrarian change in early modern Cardiganshire', *Ceredigion*, 7 (1974-5).

² See, however, the recent work of Richard Suggett: 'Slander in early-modern Wales', *British Board of Celtic Studies*, 39 (1992), 119-49; 'Festivals and social structure in early modern Wales', *Past & Present*, 152 (1996); 'The Welsh language and the court of Great Sessions' in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language before the Industrial Revolution* (Cardiff, 1997), 153-80; and also Nia Powell, 'Crime and the community in Denbighshire during the 1590s: the evidence of the records of the Court of Great Sessions', in J Gwynfor Jones (ed.), *Class, Community and Culture in Tudor Wales* (Cardiff, 1989).

³ Keith Wrightson, 'The enclosure of English social history', in Adrian Wilson (ed.), *Rethinking Social History: English Society 1570-1920 and its Interpretations* (Manchester, 1993), 68.

⁴ Linda Colley, 'The politics of eighteenth-century British history', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 377; Neil Evans, 'British history: past, present and future?' *Past & Present*, 119 (1988), 197.

⁵ For early influential studies, see: R. B. Rose, 'Eighteenth century price riots and public policy in England', *International Review of Social History*, 6 (1961), 277-92; George Rude, *The Crowd in History* (New York, 1964); E. P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd' (1971), rep. in *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth, 1993). On Wales, see David J. V. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protests in Wales, 1793-1835* (London, 1973). For a recent useful survey, see John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1832* (London, 1992).

⁶ Robert J. Holton, 'The crowd in history: some problems of theory and method', *Social History*, 3 (1978), 219, 221; Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns 1790-1835* (Cambridge, 1988), 29; beyond Britain, see e.g.: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1965); Peter Burke, 'The virgin of the Carmine and the revolt of Masaniello', *Past & Present*, 99 (1983), 3-21.

⁷ *The Diary of William Thomas of Michaelston-super-Ely, 1762-1795*, abr. and ed. by R. T. W. Denning (Cardiff, 1995): eg, 230 (horse races), 117 (wakes), etc., and the evocative entry, 'Great Rioting in St Faggans by Revelling', 127.

⁸ See the comments of Suzanne Desan, 'Crowds, community and ritual in the work of E. P. Thompson and Natalie Davis', in Lynne Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (London, 1989), 47-71.

⁹ Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester, 1985). See Prys Morgan, 'The Glais boundary dispute 1756', *Glamorgan Historian* (1973), 203-10, for an example of 'beating the bounds' being used in a dramatic confrontation between 'feudal and industrial' values

¹⁰ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, rev. edn. 1994), 270-81.

¹¹ Philip Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class: the Glamorgan Gentry 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1983); David W. Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites: the Gentry of South West Wales in the Eighteenth Century* (Cardiff, 1986); Melvin Humphreys, *The Crisis of Community, Montgomeryshire 1680-1815* (Cardiff, 1996).

¹² David W. Howell, 'Welsh agricultural neighbourhoods', in C. Richmond and I. Harvey (eds.), *Recognitions: Essays presented to Edmund Fryde* (Aberystwyth 1996), 474.

^{13.} J. Glyn Parry, 'Stability and change in mid-eighteenth century Caernarfonshire', (MA thesis, University of Wales 1978), 74-7, on these tensions in north-west Wales.

^{14.} Gareth Williams, '“How's the tenors in Dowlais?” Hegemony, harmony and popular culture in England and Wales 1600-1900', *Llafur*, 5 (1988), 72.

^{15.} Philip Jenkins, 'Times and seasons: the cycles of the year in early modern Glamorgan', *Morgannwg*, 30 (1986), 20-41; see Humphreys, *Crisis of Community*, on 'life-cycle poverty' in Montgomeryshire, 57-8.

^{16.} *The Letters of Lewis, Richard, William and John Morris of Anglesey*, ed. John H. Davies (2 vols, Aberystwyth, 1907-9), II, 241-2.

^{17.} Bob Bushaway, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880* (London, 1982), 11. On Welsh customs see Trefor M. Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs* (Llandysul, 1987) and *The Customs and Traditions of Wales* (Cardiff, 1991).

^{18.} John Evans, *Letters Written during a Tour Through South Wales* (London, 1804), p. 441; N[ational] L[ibrary of] W[ales, Aberystwyth], MS6608E, 'Remarkable customs, usages, superstitions, notions, pastimes and diversions', fols. 15, 3.

^{19.} NLW, Glynllifon Estate Papers, 380; NLW, MS6608E, 'Remarkable customs', fol. 30.

^{20.} NLW, [Records of the Courts of] G[reat] S[essions] 4/824/1.

^{21.} Peter Roberts, *The Cambrian Popular Antiquities* (London, 1815), 125; *Bye-gones relating to Wales and the Border Counties*, June 8 1904, 354-5.

^{22.} Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 201; Natalie Davis, 'The reasons of misrule' in *Society & Culture in Early Modern France*.

^{23.} Suggett, 'Festivals and social structure', 93. John Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics* (2 vols., Welsh Office, 1985), for estimates of population growth (I, 6-24) and the rapid expansion of poor relief in the second half of the eighteenth century (II, 174).

^{24.} Suggett, 'Festivals and Social Structure', 88; Anon, *A Journey to Llandrindod Wells in Radnorshire* (London, 1746), 57; NLW, MS784A, 'Recollections of a visit to Llanbeder in the county of Brecon' (1807), 167.

^{25.} Edward Pugh, *Cambria Depicta: A Tour through North Wales* (London, 1816), 440. Football: Hugh Owen, 'The diary of William Bulkeley of Brynddu, Anglesey', *Transactions of Anglesey Antiquarian Society* (1931), 26, 29, 57, 60, 69; L. T. Davies and A. Edwards, *Welsh Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1939), 139-40. Bandy: NLW MS13089E, Iolo Morganwg, 'Remarks on agriculture' (1796), fol. 243; NLW MS13089E, 'Remarkable Customs', fols. 35-6.

^{26.} NLW GS 4/51/4. In this area, town/country antagonisms led to rioting at least as early as 1537: Tim Jones, *Rioting in North East Wales 1536-1918* (Wrexham, 1997), 12.

^{27.} John Cashmere, 'The Social Uses of Violence in Ritual: *Charivari* or Religious Persecution?' *European History Quarterly* 21 (1991), 291.

^{28.} NLW GS 4/1001/5.

^{29.} NLW GS 4/889/8 & 4/889/9.

^{30.} NLW GS 4/889/4.

^{31.} This, it should be emphasized, is a typical defence: examiners who had been involved in rioting had generally been 'persuaded', 'encouraged', or even 'threatened' and 'forced' into taking part. This should be regarded with some

caution: it could be a pragmatic (and effective) strategy to avoid trouble, as local authorities with limited resources undoubtedly preferred to concentrate on a manageable number of clearly identified 'ringleaders'.

³² NLW GS 4/41/4 and 4/40/1. On the Sacheverell affair, see Geoffrey Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell* (London, 1973).

³³ *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 3 (1870), 98; *Byegones*, 28 August 1872; E. R. Morris, 'Llanfyllin dissenting meeting house (Pendre Independent Chapel), the early years to 1800', *Mont. Colls.*, 71 (1983), 18-20, 25-6.

³⁴ B. LaTrobe (ed.), *A Brief Account of the Life of Howell Harris* (Trefeca, 1791), 44-7. See John Walsh, 'Methodism and the mob', in G. J. Cuming and D. Baker (eds.), *Popular Belief and Practice* (Cambridge, 1972), 213-27.

³⁵ NLW GS 4/172/6, 4/173/1,3,8; Melvin Humphreys, 'The Llanidloes riot of 1721', *Mont. Colls.*, 75 (1987), 108-15.

³⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1755, 570.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Supplement 1757, 591.

³⁸ E. P. Thompson, 'Patricians and plebs' in *Customs in Common*; John Walter and Keith Wrightson, 'Dearth and the social order in early modern England', *Past & Present*, 71 (1976), 22-42.

³⁹ Charles Tilly, 'Food supply and public order in modern Europe', in *idem* (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, 1975), 386.

⁴⁰ Printed in Douglas Hay et al (eds.), *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1975), 327.

⁴¹ Tim Jones, *Rioting in North East Wales*, 21-2; Leonard Owen, 'The letters of an Anglesey parson 1712-1732', *THSC* (1961), 85; K. Lloyd Gruffydd, 'The Vale of Clwyd corn riots of 1740', *Journal of Flintshire Historical Society*, 27 (1975-6), 36-42.

⁴² Tilly, 'Food supply and public order', 387-8.

⁴³ Gruffydd, 'Vale of Clwyd corn riots', 38; NLW GS 4/1002/5; NLW Chirk Castle MSS E5563.

⁴⁴ NLW GS 4/47/3; NLW, Chirk Castle MSS, E87 and E4894.

⁴⁵ NLW GS 4/299/1.

⁴⁶ Parry, 'Stability and change', 98-103; NLW GS 4/252/3; Owen, 'Diary of William Bulkeley', 85.

⁴⁷ Denning, *Diary of William Thomas*, 172-3, 181-2.

⁴⁸ David J. V. Jones, *Before Rebecca*, 13.

⁴⁹ B. E. and K. A. Howells (eds.) *Pembrokeshire Life: 1572-1843* (Haverfordwest, 1972), 80.

⁵⁰ John Ladd, mayor of Newport (Pembs.), who led food riots in the town in January 1801, threatened the local justices and was arrested and jailed until the town quietened down, is an extremely rare exception whose actions would have been unusual even in the early eighteenth century: NLW GS 4/828/1.

⁵¹ E.g. NLW, Tredegar Muniments, MSS/292, 84/719, 64/355, 64/357, 64/358; Howells and Howells, *Pembrokeshire Life*, 84, 86.

⁵² NLW GS 4/628/5. The letters are reprinted in Jones, *Before Rebecca*, 228-30.

⁵³ W. Lloyd Davies, 'The riot at Denbigh, 1795', *British Board of Celtic Studies*, 4 (1927), 65, 63.

⁵⁴ PRO, HO 42/35.

⁵⁵. Hilary M. Thomas (ed.), *The Diaries of John Bird of Cardiff, 1790-1803* (Cardiff, 1987), 134.

⁵⁶. Jones, *Before Rebecca*, pp. 23-5, 206-220; NLW GS 4/630/7: Glamorgan; NLW MS6298D, 'Memoranda of the Crown side' (Flint, Summer 1740) for the earlier sentences.

⁵⁷. Recent studies of English/British loyalist crowds and celebrations include: Linda Colley, 'The apotheosis of George III: loyalty, royalty and the British nation 1760-1820', *Past & Present*, 102 (1984), 94-129 (includes some reference to Wales); G. M. Ditchfield, 'Priestley riots in historical perspective', *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, 20 (1991).

⁵⁸. The rhyme is quoted in Davies and Edwards, *Welsh Life*, p.165; E. D. Evans, *A History of Wales, 1660-1815* (Cardiff, 1976), 224.

⁵⁹. See E. H. Stuart-Jones, *The Last Invasion of Britain* (Cardiff, 1950).

⁶⁰. Glyn Roberts, *Aspects of Welsh History* (Cardiff, 1969), 80-86.

⁶¹. Quoted in *ibid*, 172; NLW, Slebech records, 2984.

⁶². Glanmor Williams, *Renewal and Reformation: Wales c.1415-1642* (Oxford, 1993), 387, 421-2; Tim Jones, *Rioting in North East Wales*, 12-23.

⁶³. Craig Jackson Calhoun, 'The radicalism of tradition: community strength or venerable disguise and borrowed language?' *American Journal of Sociology*, 88 (1983), 894.

⁶⁴. David J. V. Jones, 'Distress and discontent in Cardiganshire, 1814-1819', *Ceredigion*, 5 (1964-7); see *idem*, *Rebecca's Children: A Study of Rural Society, Crime and Protest* (Oxford, 1989).

⁶⁵. W. H. Baker, 'The Wisewood fences', *Presenting Monmouthshire* 33 (1973), 35.

⁶⁶. Jones, *Before Rebecca*, 48, 51; NLW, Picton Castle records, 1666-7, 1688-9.

⁶⁷. Quoted in Howell, *Patriarchs and Parasites*, 225-6.

⁶⁸. NLW GS 4/1012/10; Jones, *Before Rebecca*, 46.

⁶⁹. NLW, Nanteos estate records, L942.

⁷⁰. David Jenkins, '“Rhyfel y sais bach”', *Ceredigion* 1 (1950), 199-200; David Williams, '“Rhyfel y sais bach”. An enclosure riot on Mynydd Bach', *Ceredigion* 2 (1952), 39-52; David J. V. Jones, 'More light on “rhyfel y sais bach”', *Ceredigion* 5 (1964).

⁷¹. David J. V. Jones, 'Crime, protest and community in nineteenth-century Wales', *Llafur*, 1 (1974), 6.

⁷². Natalie Davis, 'Women on top' in *Society & Culture in Early Modern France*, 125, 131. Welsh women's history has only recently begun to be written and for pre-1800 is particularly underdeveloped, although there are recent signs of increasing activity, e.g. Michael Roberts, 'Gender, work and socialization in Wales, c.1450-1850' and Simone Clarke, 'The construction of genteel sensibilities: the socialization of daughters of the gentry in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Wales', in Sandra Betts (ed.), *Our Daughters' Land Past and Present* (Cardiff, 1996); Katharine Warner Swett, 'Widowhood, custom and property in early modern north Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 18 (1996), 189-227; Gerald Morgan, 'Dowries for daughters in West Wales', *ibid*, 17 (1994-5), 534-49.

⁷³. Thompson, 'Moral economy reviewed', 332.

⁷⁴. Angela V. John, 'A miner struggle? Women's protests in Welsh mining history', *Llafur*, 4 (1984), 73.

⁷⁵. An apparently all-female disturbance at Hay, Brecon, in August 1795, when a group of women seized a cart-load of grain in transit, was unusual: NLW GS 4/389/9.

⁷⁶ NLW MS6298D, 'Memoranda' (Flint Summer 1740), cf. Gruffydd, 'Vale of Clwyd corn riots', 37; NLW GS 4/252/3.

⁷⁷ Thompson, 'Moral economy reviewed' in *Customs in Common*, 324-31 (on punishment), 309-12 (on complementary roles in 'evolving' crowds). For a recent survey of European research, see Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800* (London, 1995), 458-86.

⁷⁸ Calhoun, 'Radicalism of tradition', 897; and see Rudolf M. Dekker, 'Women in revolt: popular protest and its social basis in Holland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Theory & Society* 16 (1987), 337-62.

⁷⁹ Rosemary A. N. Jones, 'Women, community and collective action' in Angela V. John, *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939* (Cardiff, 1991), 23.

⁸⁰ NLW GS 4/172/6; 4/173/8.

⁸¹ NLW GS 4/1012/10; 4/628/5.

⁸² Owen, 'Letters of an Anglesey Parson', 85; PRO, HO 42/35.

⁸³ NLW GS 4/813/6-7, 4/814/3.

⁸⁴ NLW GS 4/176/3.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Jones, *Before Rebecca*, 47.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 128 (Carmarthen) and 143 (Merthyr); Gwyn A. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising* (Cardiff, 1988), eg, 116, 129.

⁸⁷ The few eighteenth-century records include: 1765 'skymmetry', Glamorgan, *Diary of William Thomas*, 133; a tentatively identified example at Presteigne in 1752, NLW GS 4/522/2; early nineteenth century: 'Court Beans', Pugh, *Cambria Depicta*, 438-9; NLW GS 4/201/8 (Montgomeryshire). Cf. the (voluminous) English material: E. P. Thompson, 'Rough music' in *Customs in Common*; Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, rough music and the 'reform of popular culture' in early modern England', *Past & Present*, 105 (1984), 79-113; and Wales from the 1830s: Rosemary A. N. Jones, 'Women, community and collective action' and 'Popular culture, policing and the 'disappearance' of the *ceffyl pren* in Cardigan, c.1837-1850', *Ceredigion* 11 (1988-9), 19-39.

⁸⁸ See Gareth Williams, 'Sport and society in Glamorgan 1750-1980' in Prys Morgan (ed.), *Glamorgan County History, vol. 6: Glamorgan Society 1780-1980* (Cardiff, 1988).

⁸⁹ Rosemary Jones, 'Women, community and collective action', 33-7.

⁹⁰ See A. Watkin-Jones, 'The interludes of Wales in the eighteenth century', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 4 (1927). Roberts, *Cambrian Popular Antiquities*, 139-40, whilst acknowledging the vigour of the performance, regarded them as 'vile' imitations of 'classic' traditions of drama. At least as early as the 1730s, some officials were connecting 'interluders' with disorder and attempting to suppress them: NLW, Chirk Castle MSS, E4576.

⁹¹ There has, in particular, been a lack of attention here to regional variations: for vigorous reminders of the difficulties see Williams, *When was Wales?*; and also Philip Jenkins, 'Seventeenth-century Wales: definition and identity', in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds.), *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533-1707* (Cambridge, 1998).