

H.M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES 6

DANIEL HUWS

Five Ancient Books of Wales



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE, AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Hector Munro Chadwick (1870-1947) was Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge from 1912 to 1941. Through the immense range of his scholarly publications, and through the vigorous enthusiasm which he brought to all aspects of Anglo-Saxon studies — philological and literary, historical and archaeological — he helped to define the field and to give it the interdisciplinary orientation which characterises it still. The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, which owes its existence and its own interdisciplinary outlook to H.M. Chadwick, has wished to commemorate his enduring contribution to Anglo-Saxon studies by establishing an annual series of lectures in his name.

© Daniel Huws 1995

First published 1996 by the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 9 West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DP, England.

ISBN 978-0-9517339-5-0 / 0 9517339 5 8

ISSN 0962-0702

Reprinted by the Reprographics Centre, University of Cambridge.

H.M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES 6

DANIEL HUWS

Five Ancient Books of Wales



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE, AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Five Ancient Books of Wales

DANIEL HUWS

English is a great romantic literature. Distantly connected with this fact I am sure is the touching readiness of many English readers to wonder, hesitatingly, whether Welsh poetry may not be older than English poetry, whether it may not be something more intricate, not to say more mysterious, and whether it may not survive in manuscripts which are more ancient. The first two could be valid points for discussion, but they are not appropriate to a lecture which is about books rather than poetry. As for the third, there is hardly need of a specialist to pronounce that it is wrong. The earliest manuscript book of Welsh poetry is centuries later than the earliest ones of English poetry.

To be famous you need a name. Two of the five books I am going to talk about had acquired their names by the end of the sixteenth century, if not earlier: *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin*, the Black Book of Carmarthen (National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 1), and *Llyfr Coch Hergest*, the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Jesus College MS 111). These two have in common another attainment. They both passed through the hands of Sir John Prise, the first conspicuous Welsh collector of manuscripts after the dissolution of the monasteries, and made fleeting precociously early appearances in print, by way of brief quotation in Prise's defence of the British history, *Historiae Brytannicae Defensio*, a work written in the 1540s and published posthumously in 1573.

Another of the five had acquired its name by the time it was catalogued in the library of Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt about 1658: *Llyfr Taliesin*, the Book of Taliesin (NLW, MS Peniarth 2). While another, *Llyfr Aneirin*, the Book of Aneirin (Cardiff Central Library, MS 2.81), appears to have been given its name by Edward Lhuyd. The name first occurs in the invaluable catalogue of Welsh manuscripts which Lhuyd included in his *Archaeologia Britannica* (1707), where the four books are grouped together for the first time.

In 1868 the Scottish historian William Skene published *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, an admirable work with a catchy title, so catchy that even today you should not be surprised to hear the organiser of a literary festival in Wales blithely announce that it is hoped to exhibit 'the Four Ancient Books of Wales'.¹ Skene's four books are the four books already mentioned. He recognised that these four contained the oldest texts of most of the early Welsh poetry. This poetry had been in print since 1801 in the egregious *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (a few poems had appeared in earlier publications), but in poor texts derived from late copies. Skene went back to the four sources. That his published text has its misreadings and that the translations are poor ones are faults we need not dwell on.

¹ W.F. Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (Edinburgh, 1868).

The title of my lecture looks like a challenge to Skene. It is really more of a tribute. His books are still ‘the four books containing the earliest Welsh poetry’. Mine are ‘the five earliest books of Welsh poetry’; the earliest books do not necessarily contain the earliest poetry. The point is made by my fifth book, the Hendregadredd Manuscript (NLW MS 6680). It was unknown to Skene, but although earlier in date than two of his four books would not have been relevant to his volumes because of the relative lateness of its contents.

The Hendregadredd Manuscript, like all but one of our five, the Red Book of Hergest, was at one time in Robert Vaughan’s collection at Hengwrt. Like the Book of Aneirin (and other valuable manuscripts) it was borrowed from Hengwrt, if not stolen, never to return, during a period in the eighteenth century when the famous library was badly neglected. Not until 1910 was the Hendregadredd Manuscript ‘outed’, having then been found, it was said, at Hendregadredd, a house near Porthmadog, ‘in an old bachelor’s wardrobe in a disused bedroom’. By 1910, even in scholarly circles, ‘book’ had almost lost the connotation ‘manuscript’: instead of ‘the Book of Hendregadredd’ we have inherited ‘the Hendregadredd Manuscript’.

All but a very small number of extant Welsh poems earlier than 1330 A.D. come from one or more of our five books. The few exceptions are: poems in early books whose contents are otherwise predominantly prose; a few which survive in fragments of early manuscripts; a few in later copies which are explicit about their now lost sources, and a few in later copies which are not.² Three important medieval collections of early poetry which were lost in post-medieval times (though none could have compared in importance with our five survivors) are that part of the White Book of Rhydderch which contained most of its poetry; a source of poetry of the Gogynfeirdd which was used by Dr John Davies of Mallwyd; and an ‘exact copy’ of the Black Book of Carmarthen, evidently made in the early fourteenth century, which was owned by Humphrey Humphreys.³

My intention in talking about the five ancient books, none of which have wanted for detailed attention, is to try to characterise them. But first, in order to make sure that a few important distinctions are understood, I have briefly to be didactic. Welsh bardic grammars (the earliest surviving text dates from about 1330) speak of *hengerdd*, ‘ancient poetry’; knowledge of it was required of a bard. It was ‘ancient’ in contrast to the modes of poetry current when the grammars were composed, in the early fourteenth century. The poets associated with *hengerdd* came in later centuries

² Early poetry occurs as primary text in the White Book of Rhydderch (NLW, MSS Peniarth 4 and 5), the Red Book of Talgarth (NLW, MS Llanstephan 27) and Oxford, Jesus College MS 20, and as added text in the Black Book of Chirk (NLW, MS Peniarth 29). NLW, MS Peniarth 3 parts i and ii are stray quires containing poetry. Lost sources, ‘old’ and on parchment, are referred to by Jaspas Gryffyth in MSS Peniarth 53 and Llanstephan 120, by Dr John Davies in Peniarth 102 and by John Jones in Peniarth 111 (see *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language* (London, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 1898-1910), i, pp. 405, 638 and 671, ii, p. 605).

³ On the lost quire of the White Book, see Jenny Rowland, ‘The manuscript tradition of the Red Book *Englynion*’, *Studia Celtica*, 18/19 (1983-84), pp. 79-95; D. Huws, ‘Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 21 (1991), pp. 1-37 (5, 29). On Dr John Davies’s source, see Gerald Morgan, ‘Testun Barddoniaeth y Tywysogion yn llsgr. N.L.W. 4973’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 20 (1962-64), pp. 95-103; Rowland, ‘The manuscript tradition’. A strong case could be made for regarding Dr Davies’s source as missing quires of the Hendregadredd Manuscript; it would have dove-tailed well. The ‘exact copy’ of the Black Book which Humphrey Humphreys (1648-1712) refers to in a note on f. i was in ‘the very same hand’ as that at the bottom of f. 24^v. This hand looks early fourteenth century.

to be called *Cynfeirdd*, while the bards whose poetry set the standards for the grammars, court bards of the preceding two centuries, came to be known as *Gogynfeirdd*. The two kinds of poetry are usually kept apart in manuscripts. A third kind came into being about 1330, associated with the poets who adopted the new metre commonly called the *cywydd* and the new spirit which arrived with it, poets who came to be called *Cywyddwyr*.

To put into perspective my account of the five books, something also needs to be said about the written tradition of Welsh vernacular literature and the earliest books. The earliest written Welsh in manuscript is probably that which occurs in marginal additions to the Lichfield Gospels ('the Book of St Chad', Lichfield Cathedral MS 1). This was probably written about 800 A.D.⁴ The earliest Welsh poetry in manuscript is here in Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.4.42, a manuscript of Juvencus in which were added in the late ninth or early tenth century two series of englynion. Manuscripts for over three hundred years after this date have nothing more substantial than these englynion to offer. Nor does Welsh prose fare much better during these centuries; we have only brief and fragmentary texts, and glosses.

All of a sudden — in the historical time-scale — the scene is transformed. Around the middle of the thirteenth century books written in Welsh crowd in. Over fifty books survive from the hundred years or so between the mid-thirteenth and the mid-fourteenth century. These years saw the recording of most of the treasures of early Welsh literature, in books which, though modest enough by international standards, were superior in quality of production to most of those which followed in Wales in the later Middle Ages. Between about 1250 and about 1350, these Welsh books display a growth in size and scope and assurance. The implication must be that in Wales around 1250 large codices of vernacular literature such as survive from as early as 1100 for Irish and English were unknown. If they ever existed, that tradition had been broken.

That there must have been books of some kind in Welsh, as distinct from books in Latin to which additions in Welsh had been made, by the twelfth century, if not earlier, seems certain. Giraldus Cambrensis refers to them (he particularly rejoiced in having tracked down a copy of the prophesies of 'Merlinus'). Geoffrey of Monmouth's notorious 'ancient book in the British tongue' may or may not have existed, but his reference to it is surely evidence that books in Welsh were not unknown. Evidence of another kind lurks in some thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Welsh texts, in survivals of earlier orthography and in errors which can only be explained as misreadings of Insular script.

Excellent Insular script was still written at Llanbadarn Fawr about 1100 A.D. A few Insular letter-forms survive, associated with passages in the vernacular, in the two main hands of the Book of Llandaf (NLW MS 17110), written in the most Normanised part of Wales in the middle of the twelfth century. But in general we lack evidence to show how long Insular script persisted in Wales. My suspicion is that in those Welsh *clasau* (the major ecclesiastical centres) which remained immune to

⁴ Dafydd Jenkins and Morfydd E. Owen, 'The Welsh marginalia in the Lichfield Gospels', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 5 (1983), pp. 37-66, and 7 (1984), pp. 91-120. Interpretation of the evidence of dating of the *Surexit* memorandum can follow several lines. 'About 800' reflects my preference.

Norman influence, in north and mid-Wales, it may have survived into the thirteenth century, particularly perhaps for use with the vernacular (as was the case with Anglo-Saxon). Such conservatism would have been characteristic of the Welsh scribal tradition. I make this point because it may offer part of an explanation for the total disappearance of books in Welsh earlier than about 1250. In England, books in Anglo-Saxon in Insular script mostly survived the Middle Ages as sleepers in large ecclesiastical libraries. In Ireland, early books in Irish probably survived because their Insular script belonged recognisably to a continuing tradition. In Wales there was neither continuity of libraries (unless possibly at tSt Davids, where most of the books seem to have been destroyed soon after the Reformation) nor continuity of script.

* * * * * *

In 1936 the Oxford University Press published the *Oxford Book of Modern English Verse 1892-1935*, edited by W.B. Yeats. It was received with some dismay; it had about it more the air of the 1890s than the 1930s. Beside the large eccentricity of the selection, the inclusion in an anthology of modern English verse of a version of a Welsh poem from the Black Book of Carmarthen may have seemed no more than amiable perversity. This poem, in Welsh, opens marvellously: *Y beddau a'i gwlych y glaw* (lamely, 'The graves which the rain wets'). A Chinese poet might almost have left it at that. The Welsh poet goes on to build up an evocative catalogue of places of the graves of heroes (one which these days is likely to be pigeon-holed as 'antiquarian verse'). Before turning to the Black Book of Carmarthen itself we might notice the first line of the English version by Edward Rhys which had appealed to Yeats: 'In graves where drips the winter rain'. Almost everything lost, Stoke Poges rather than a Welsh mountain.

The Black Book of Carmarthen was long regarded as 'the oldest Welsh manuscript', and dated late twelfth century. Now anchored in the mid-thirteenth century, it still has claim to be the oldest manuscript of Welsh poetry.⁵ Its scribe — and contrary to first impressions there seems only to have been one — stands out among the scribes associated with our five books as the most wayward. Furthermore, since the book is one whose composition can only satisfactorily be explained by supposing that the scribe also chose the contents, we discover that as an anthologist he was as wayward as he was as a scribe.

Characteristic of good book-production is regularity in basic procedures. The Black Book throughout is extraordinarily irregular: in its quiring, in its pattern of ruling, in the number of lines to the page, in its script. Visually, its opening is dramatic. The first pages are written in a large, majestic, slightly laboured textura using only alternate ruled lines: a thirteenth-century reader could have been reminded of the scriptural text of a glossed book of the Bible, or the canon of the mass in a missal. But these books would have been large ones; the Black Book is small (no more than 17x13 cm). The page can only accommodate nine lines of such script —

⁵ J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Facsimile of the Black Book of Carmarthen* (Oxford, 1888); idem, *The Black Book of Carmarthen* (Pwllheli, 1907); N. Denholm-Young, *Handwriting in England and Wales* (Cardiff, 1954), pp. 42-3; A.O.H. Jarman, *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (Cardiff, 1982); idem, 'Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin: the Black Book of Carmarthen', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 71 (1985), pp. 333-56.

about forty words, or six lines of verse (written without line breaks, as prose: not till the fifteenth century did Welsh scribes begin to write poetry line by line). Such generous spacing and such high grade script for something as off-beat as vernacular poetry is, in its time, bizarre. The result is what Denholm-Young has called a 'palaeographical freak'. The appearance of the page is the most immediately striking aspect of the compiler's eccentricity.

The scribe of the Black Book had to come to terms with practicality. Forty words to the page is not practical in a book for grown-ups. He reduced the size of his script, chopping and changing somewhat, and gave up writing only on alternate lines. The un-uniform appearance of the pages of the Black Book (which have led some to attribute it to several hands) is due in part to its being the product of many phases of activity. To judge by changes of script-size, of script, of quill and of ink, the Black Book as we know it (at least three quires are probably lost) is the product of fourteen phases of writing, not to count stints within these phases. Our scribe was also the rubricator, and no doubt responsible also for the drawings (such as a beast and a man's head) which adorn some run-ons at the foot of pages. Different mixes of red, and of green in some quires, suggest that rubrication in turn was done in nine separate phases.⁶ All in all, without our even beginning to read the text, the Black Book gives an impression of being a slowly built-up work of love.

Lay-out and script alone suggest that the Black Book originated in an ecclesiastical milieu. The anthology contains a remarkable variety of poetry, much of it religious, but the poems given pride of place and written in the largest script are secular. The secular poetry includes legendary 'saga poems', vaticination, such as the *Afallennau* and the *Oianau*, five praise-poems, three of them by Cynddelw, the greatest of the twelfth-century court poets, and even parody. Our compiler showed little concern about grouping like with like. The lack of order could be explained by a slow heterogeneous accumulation; this would tally with the spasmodic activity suggested by the evidence of script and rubrication.

If the compilation of the Black Book was indeed such a spasmodic process as is here envisaged there are several conclusions which seem to follow. Our compiler was guided by personal taste, he was working for himself, with no clear preconceived idea of what his book would contain. In this, he stands apart from all the scribes of our other four books. We might say that the impulse was literary rather than antiquarian. Charm is a word which can be used of many poems in the Black Book. It is not a word brought to mind by much of the *hengerdd* in the other manuscripts, even less so by the poetry of the *Gogynfeirdd*.

A second conclusion concerns the sources of the compiler. They were presumably many, though not necessarily as many as fourteen. And if the sources were many, none of them yielding a large haul of poems, it is fair to ask: were they all written sources? Of our five books, the Black Book seems the likeliest to contain a substantial proportion of poems which might derive directly from oral tradition. This likelihood is increased by the presence in the Black Book of several abbreviated texts

⁶ The use of green rather than blue as counter to red in the decoration, rare in English manuscripts after the twelfth century, is to be found in Welsh manuscripts as late as the fourteenth century.

and ‘floaters’, fragments of poems, some of them known elsewhere in fuller versions.⁷

A last conclusion concerns the orthography of the Black Book. The orthography is fairly consistent and has received much attention, largely because for much of this century it was taken to typify Welsh orthography of *circa* 1200. If we are right to accept the Black Book as a compilation made from many sources, the simplest explanation of the consistency of the orthography is that it was imposed by the scribe. It does not necessarily represent any external standard.⁸

Where was the Black Book written? At the Dissolution the Black Book was rescued from Carmarthen priory, a house of Augustinian canons.⁹ It is indeed the only Welsh vernacular manuscript about whose rescue from a religious house we have any circumstantial details. (Of our other four books, three if not all four were in secular hands at the end of the Middle Ages.) But was the Black Book written at Carmarthen? This likelihood has been proposed on account of the dominant south-west Wales interest of the contents and the prominence of poetry associated with Myrddin (the supposed eponym of Carmarthen).¹⁰ It might be held that the near-autonomy of houses of Augustinian canons and their relative openness to the laity could have provided an environment congenial to the headstrong eccentric to whom I give credit for the Black Book.

* * * * *

Our second book is the Book of Aneirin, perhaps a generation later in date than the Black Book; most scholars have been content with a date in the second half of the thirteenth century.¹¹ We have little but the script to judge by. This again is a small book. A mere nineteen leaves are extant, an indeterminate number, but probably not many, wanting at the end. Until the seventeenth century the book was not even bound: it evidently survived in a succession of limp covers. The Book of Aneirin is our sole source of the *Gododdin*. This is the work about which Lewis Morris wrote so extravagantly after its discovery by Evan Evans in 1758: ‘And this discovery is to him and to me as great as that of America by Columbus. We have found an epic poem in the British called Gododin, equal at least to the Iliad, Aeneid or Paradise Lost.

⁷ See, for example, in Jarman, *Llyfr Du*, the following items and the editor’s comment: 10, 13, 24, 26, 27, 28, 35 and 40. On item 10 see the comment in Marged Haycock, *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Ganu Crefyddol Cynnar* (Llandybïe, 1994), p. 18.

⁸ See T.M. Charles-Edwards and P. Russell, ‘The Hendregadredd Manuscript and the orthography and phonology of Welsh in the early fourteenth century’, *National Library of Wales Journal*, 28 (1993-94), pp. 419-62 (especially 420).

⁹ Jarman, *Llyfr Du*, pp. lxvii-lxviii.

¹⁰ Jarman, *Llyfr Du*, pp. xvii-xviii, lxx-lxxi. A Cistercian house, Whitland for instance, was suggested by R.G. Gruffydd, ‘Cyntefin ceinaf amser’, *Ysgrifau Beirniadol IV*, ed. J.E. Caerwyn Williams (Denbigh, 1969), pp. 12-26 (14-17).

¹¹ J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Facsimile and Text of the Book of Aneirin* (Pwllheli, 1908); Ifor Williams, *Canu Aneirin* (Cardiff, 1938); Denholm-Young, *Handwriting*, p. 44; A.O.H. Jarman, *Aneirin: Y Gododdin: Britain’s Oldest Poem* (Llandysul, 1988); *Early Welsh Poetry: Studies in the Book of Aneirin*, ed. B.F. Roberts (Aberystwyth, 1988); D. Huws, *Llyfr Aneirin: a Facsimile* (Aberystwyth, 1989).

Tudfwlch and Marchlew are heroes fiercer than Achilles or Satan'.¹² Five short and early poems called *Gorchanau* complete the book.

Visually the Book of Aneirin is very different from the Black Book. If the Black Book is a case of uninhibited trying on costume, the Book of Aneirin comes in a sober suit. Quiring, ruling and the number of lines to the page are regular. The script is clear and unostentatious, rubrication and decoration, on the pages written by the main scribe, are simple and consistent.¹³ There are two scribes. Scribe A opens with the rubric *Hwn yw y Gododin. Aneirin ai cant* ('This is the Gododdin. Aneirin sang it'). He concluded his text of the *Gododdin* in the third quire, without an explicit, and left the remainder of the quire blank. He evidently regarded his text as incomplete and hoped to return to it. Beginning a new quire, he copied the *Gorchanau*, in two stints, failing to rubricate the second. Another hand, scribe B, now appears, perhaps a contemporary of scribe A with a slightly younger looking hand, or perhaps a later comer. Using the blank space left by scribe A at the end of quires 3 and 4, and adding a fifth quire of his own, scribe B wrote the text of forty two further *awdlau* of the *Gododdin*. Scribe B's text is of particular interest to scholars: in contrast to scribe A's, it preserves a large element of Old Welsh orthography; and almost half its *awdlau* are variants, if distant ones, of *awdlau* already copied in scribe A's text, offering precious evidence of divergence during what must have been a period of oral transmission.

In the Black Book we encountered an enthusiastic anthologist. Here, in the Book of Aneirin, the aim is narrower, and the personnel more reticent. The common aim was to recover the text of the *Gododdin* and its attendant *Gorchanau*. Whether scribe A or scribe B or an invisible third party was the moving spirit we cannot say. What can safely be said is that the writing of the Book of Aneirin was an operation to rescue, from two if not more exemplars, treasured texts which had probably almost passed from oral currency and which were perhaps no longer entirely understood. The long rubric assigning fairytale-like values in *ymryson* (poetic contest) to poems in the book suggests that the real value of the contents of the Book of Aneirin was by now largely talismanic.

To the question of where the Book of Aneirin was written the answer has to be vague. Of our five books, it is the only one which may not be of south Welsh origin: the absence of instances of *h-* for *ch-* points that way.¹⁴ The good quality parchment and disciplined expertise of scribe A's work suggest a practised centre of book-production. For this, in thirteenth-century Wales, we still look to monastic scriptoria, and for books in the vernacular, to the small family of Cistercian houses which grew up under native Welsh patronage. At the risk of being tendentious, I will mention one such monastery: Strata Marcella, near Welshpool, founded by the poet-prince Owain Cyfeiliog who was buried there in 1197. The one long poem attributed to Owain which has survived, *Hirlas Owain*, echoes the *Gododdin* in structure and phrase. Strata Marcella scribes might conceivably have had a role in the transmission of the text of the *Gododdin*.

¹² *Additional Letters of the Morrisies of Anglesey (1735-1786)*, ed. Hugh Owen (London, 1947-9), i, p. 349.

¹³ The second scribe, Scribe B, made no use of colour.

¹⁴ Marged Haycock, 'Llyfr Taliesin', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 25 (1987-88), pp. 357-86 (364).

* * * * *

In December 1282 Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was killed and his head sent to London. For some, most memorably for Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch in a famous elegy, it was like the end of the world. For everyone in Wales, whether they regarded the event with despair or resignation or even with relief, it marked an epoch. Not long after 1282 at the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida a Latin chronicle of Welsh history up to 1282, based on monastic annals, was given form.¹⁵ The Latin chronicle is lost, but we know it from two derivative Welsh versions which circulated widely, known as *Brut y Tywysogion*. The earliest surviving manuscript of one version, Peniarth 20, was written at the Cistercian abbey of Valle Crucis about 1330, and of the other, Peniarth 18, probably at Strata Florida, in the mid-fourteenth century.

Also not long after 1282, a remarkable editor, again probably at Strata Florida, undertook to make a more unusual monument to the extinguished independent rule of Wales. He set about collecting the poetry of the court poets associated with the Welsh rulers of the previous two centuries. His horizon was Meilyr, court poet of Gruffudd ap Cynan, king of Gwynedd. His terminus was 1282. When scholars speak of the 'Poets of the Princes' they tacitly acknowledge the chapter of Welsh literary history defined by this anonymous compiler. His compilation is the *Hendregadredd Manuscript*.

As an artefact, the *Hendregadredd Manuscript* is by far the most revealing of our five books.¹⁶ The compiler — called Alpha, to distinguish him from the two groups of scribes which followed him, labelled A-S and a-t — gathered in separate quires, or, when necessary, in sequences of quires, the poetry of each bard. Having allocated quires to all the main bards, he allowed one quire for 'others', the bards represented only by a few poems each. He writes a fluent and bold hand, with a thick nib, which in its squatness and roundedness suggests a university training. Not only is his organisation good, his texts are good. He left his successors sixteen quires (besides one or more now missing), about three-quarters full. His work is rubricated and decorated by a hand which is one of the few accomplished pen-flourishers to be met with in Welsh medieval vernacular manuscripts. This rubrication and decoration can be said to seal stratum I.

Alpha's work was continued by nineteen other scribes, contemporaries or near-contemporaries, all of them writing competent textura. They supplemented Alpha's collection, adding poems in appropriate quires, respecting his arrangement. They more or less completed the original plan; less than 10% of the book was now empty. Their work was rubricated and decorated by several hands, but none by the

¹⁵Thomas Jones, *Brut y Tywysogion or the Chronicle of the Princes: Peniarth MS. 20 Version* (Cardiff, 1952), pp. xxxv-xliv.

¹⁶ *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, transcribed by Rhiannon Morris-Jones, ed. J. Morris-Jones and T.H. Parry-Williams (Cardiff, 1933); D. Huws, 'Llawysgrif Hendregadredd', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 22 (1981-82), pp. 1-26; Charles-Edwards and Russell, 'The Hendregadredd Manuscript'. The work of the Poets of the Princes, for which the *Hendregadredd Manuscript* is the prime source, is being edited in seven volumes, *Cyfres Beirdd y Tywysogion*, general editor R.G. Gruffydd (Cardiff, 1991-).

skilful hand which decorated the work of Alpha. This unskilled rubrication is the seal on stratum II of the Hendregadredd Manuscript.

There remained some blank leaves at the end of some quires, the unfilled 10%. This too in turn came to be filled, by twenty further scribes, in what evidently was a somewhat different environment. Many of these scribes no longer write *textura*; none of their texts are rubricated. A more profound difference in this third stratum is in the nature of its contents. Alpha's scheme is ignored; what these scribes add is poetry of a very different kind, poetry of the first generation of the *Cywyddwyr*, including poems by Dafydd ap Gwilym. Much of this poetry concerns Ieuan Llwyd ab Ieuan and his wife Angharad. The home of Ieuan and Angharad was in Llangeitho, in Ceredigion, some ten miles from Strata Florida; Ieuan's floruit is 1332-43. While the contents of this third stratum lie on the threshold of an exciting new age of Welsh poetry, their present relevance is that they help fix the Hendregadredd Manuscript in time and place. We cannot be far wrong in saying that stratum III is contemporary with Ieuan, stratum II belongs to the first quarter of the fourteenth century and stratum I to around 1300; and that stratum III is the handiwork of a lay household and its visitors while strata II and I are the handiwork of a scriptorium, probably at Strata Florida, where, to speculate, Alpha, the architect of the book, may also have had a hand in the genesis of *Brut y Tywysogion*, the product of similar historical awareness.

Following the strong-headed anthologist of the Black Book and the quiet antiquarians who rescued the *Gododdin* in the Book of Aneirin, we have the able and incisive editor who precociously identified a chapter of Welsh literary history and preserved its poetry in the Hendregadredd Manuscript. The generation of scribes which continued his work, together with the scribes of the third stratum, not only added to the literary richness but made of the Hendregadredd Manuscript the most valuable palaeographical repertory of the Welsh Middle Ages.

* * * * *

With regard to its contents, the Book of Taliesin would probably be thought by many to be the most fascinating of our five books.¹⁷ It includes the 'historical' poems of Taliesin, poems which are the fountainhead of the Welsh bardic tradition, poems which ostensibly date from the late sixth century. It also includes much of the poetry associated with the legendary Taliesin, poetry potent and puzzling enough to sustain many a White Goddess and New Age. The historical, the quasi-historical, the religious, the learned, the arcane, they all come together. But that said, the Book of Taliesin as an artefact is much the least interesting of the five books. Small, like the Black Book and the Book of Aneirin, written, to judge by the script, in the first half of the fourteenth century, it is the product of straightforward copying by a single scribe, regular in its scribal practices. Beyond the Book of Taliesin, at one or more removes, must lie an exemplar which may have resembled the Black Book, an original compilation drawing its rich material from a variety of sources; though it should be said that the Book of Taliesin is slightly more orderly in arrangement than the Black Book, and more exclusive, in that it excludes both poetry of the *Gogynfeirdd* and

¹⁷ J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *Facsimile and Text of the Book of Taliesin* (Llanbedrog, 1910); Denholm-Young, *Handwriting*, p. 44; Haycock, 'Llyfr Taliesin'.

‘saga poetry’. To the eye, however, the Book of Taliesin itself is seamless, the editorial activity screened. It is like a new housing estate: we are surprised to discover after a while what interesting old characters live in some of the houses.

The most interesting thing about the excellent but self-effacing scribe who wrote the Book of Taliesin is that we have confirmation that he was at one level a mere scribe. Four other manuscripts in his hand survive: two books of Welsh law, a *Brut y Brenhinedd* (the Welsh version of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*) and a copy of the romance of *Geraint*.¹⁸ He is as good an example as any of an expert scribe active during the best period of production of books of vernacular literature in medieval Wales. It would be a boon to know where he worked. But he left no colophon. We can only say that such pointers as we have, in the texts he copied and in the later descent of the five manuscripts, direct us towards south-east Wales.¹⁹ The Book of Taliesin itself was in Radnorshire in the sixteenth century, and, it seems likely, in the fifteenth century also, in lay hands.²⁰ If the combination of good parchment, a practised scribe and good texts is sufficient to indicate an institutional scriptorium, we again find ourselves looking at the Cistercians, and wishing this time that we knew more about the strongly Welsh abbey of Cwmhir.

* * * * *

In Welsh, as in French, and English, the word *Brut* (derived from *Brutus*, the supposed eponym of Britain) came to mean a ‘history’. In Welsh it developed the further meaning ‘prophesy’. To the Welsh in particular, history and prophesy were complementary. Not until Henry VII came to the throne in 1485, fulfilling, it seemed, the ancient prophesies, did political prophesy cease to be a strain in Welsh poetry. Owain Glyndŵr knew this poetry and took prophesy seriously. In July 1403 his fortunes were riding high. He was in Carmarthen and sent for Hopcyn ap Tomas ‘of Gower’, described as ‘master of Brut’, to come to Carmarthen under a safe-conduct to tell him ‘how and of what manner it should befall of him’.²¹ Hopcyn, then an old man, must have had a reputation as an interpreter of prophetic poetry. Hopcyn’s answer has been regarded by some historians as one of ingenious self-interest. He foretold that Owain would be captured between Carmarthen and Gower. Whether or not as a consequence of this answer, the fact is that Owain did not go in that direction. Gower, and Hopcyn’s home, were spared the ravage, by both English and Welsh, which laid waste much of Wales in the years of Owain’s rising. And of greatest moment, given the subject of this lecture, Hopcyn’s library survived the war.

In Philadelphia there is a medieval Welsh manuscript of *Brut y Brenhinedd*.²² The manuscript was unknown to Welsh scholars until the 1960s. It is one of the precious few medieval Welsh manuscripts which has a colophon. From it we learn that the

¹⁸ Haycock, ‘Llyfr Taliesin’, pp. 359-60.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 363-7.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 367-8.

²¹ Henry Ellis, *Original Letters*, 2nd series, I (London, 1827), p. 23.

²² Philadelphia, Public Library Company, MS 8680. See B.F. Roberts, ‘Un o lawysgrifau Hopcyn ap Tomas o Ynys Dawy’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 22 (1966-68), pp. 223-8.

book was written by Hywel Fychan ap Hywel Goch of Buellt at the command of his master, Hopcyn ap Tomas ab Einon. This colophon has been the key to several doors. Hopcyn ap Tomas was already known as the subject of praise-poems; the hand of the Philadelphia manuscript was recognised in several other manuscripts, most notably the Red Book of Hergest, a book which includes five poems addressed to Hopcyn.²³ The new evidence made fairly certain what had previously been a suggestion: that the Red Book was written for Hopcyn ap Tomas.²⁴ The Red Book is the only one of our five books whose making can be connected to named persons. The Red Book itself may even have had a colophon: a common feature of all five books is that their final leaves are missing. They have suffered damage characteristic of books whose bindings have been at some stage too loose for too long, or which may even have lost their covers.

Some book reviewers like to tell us the weight of a book under review, seldom meaning to be complimentary about the book. I do not know the weight of the Red Book of Hergest. It will be enough to say that it is by far the heaviest of the medieval books in Welsh, the largest in its dimensions (34 x 21 cm) and the thickest (362 parchment leaves, originally at least 382). Oddly, its very size exemplifies a bibliographical phenomenon. The largest English vernacular books of the Middle Ages, the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts, are contemporaries of the Red Book. (They are, it should be said, even larger.) It was an age of the jumbo book.

The Red Book was written sometime after 1382, probably quite soon after that date. It was written by Hywel Fychan with the collaboration of two other scribes.²⁵ Hywel's brief appears to have been to gather into one book the classics of Welsh literature. The book has been described as a one-volume library. To judge by our knowledge of pre-1400 Welsh literature, he successfully collected the best of the prose: the group of tales which later found fame as 'the Mabinogion', the main historical texts and most of the other narrative texts. Obviously deliberate exclusions were law and religion, doubtless because Hopcyn had these texts in other books. The inclusions and exclusions of poetry have more interesting implications. There is a large collection of *hengerdd*, but the poetry of the Book of Aneirin is quite absent, and most of that in the Book of Taliesin: it must have been unavailable. There is a good collection of the poetry of the Gogynfeirdd, poorer however than that of the Hendregadredd Manuscript for the pre-1282 period. The poetry of the Gogynfeirdd in the Red Book begins with a large body of religious poems. Some degree of classification was probably the intention. But the arrangement soon broke down. What follows is a jumble of praise-poetry, religious poetry and satire, offering an added interest in that the undigested blocks may represent distinct sources. Where the

²³ The fullest description of the Red Book of Hergest remains that by Gwenogvryn Evans in *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*, ii, pp. 1-29; the poetry is printed in J. Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Poetry in the Red Book of Hergest* (Llanbedrog, 1911); there is valuable comment by Eurys I. Rowlands in 'Nodiadau ar y traddodiad moliant a'r cywydd', *Llên Cymru*, 7 (1962-63), pp. 217-43 (220-2); on the scribes, see G. Charles-Edwards, 'The scribes of the Red Book of Hergest', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 21 (1989-90), pp. 246-56. The name of the book derives from its late medieval home at Hergest, near Kington; on the descent of the Red Book, see Prys Morgan, 'Glamorgan and the Red Book', *Morgannwg* 22 (1978), pp. 42-60.

²⁴ The suggestion was made by G.J. Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg* (Cardiff, 1948), pp. 11-14, 147-8. On Hopcyn ap Tomas, see Christine James, "'Llwyr wybodau, llên a llyfrau": Hopcyn ap Tomas a'r traddodiad llenyddol Cymraeg' in *Cwm Tawe*, ed. H.T. Edwards (Llandysul, 1994), pp. 4-44.

²⁵ G. Charles-Edwards, 'The scribes'.

Red Book surpasses all other manuscripts is in the poetry of the fourteenth-century Gogynfeirdd, poets who were contemporaries of Hopcyn ap Tomas himself, including much of their satire. The presence of this large group of the work of the late Gogynfeirdd raises a question about the gaping absence of the work of their contemporaries, the earliest of the Cywyddwyr, of whom Dafydd ap Gwilym might be taken as representative. The exclusion must have been deliberate. Hopcyn was conservative in taste. The five bards who sang his praise all opted for the old-fashioned *awdl*, not the *cywydd*; they must have known what he favoured. But we ought not perhaps to dismiss the possibility that Hopcyn may also have appreciated the *cywydd*, and taken steps to have a collection made, consigned however to a lesser (and lost) book.

In terms of the production of collections of Welsh literature in the Middle Ages, the Red Book can be seen as a climax. The thirteenth-century books are generally small in size and in scope. The fourteenth century showed increasing ambition; the White Book of Rhydderch in mid-century (a collection mainly of prose) reached a new level of inclusiveness, to be outdone in turn by the great codex of Hywel Fychan and his fellow scribes. But in terms of quality of production the Red Book represents a falling away from the standards of the earlier books.

* * * * * *

If we had to depend on manuscripts of the period 1400-1550 for our knowledge of pre-1330 Welsh poetry we should have to speak very dismissively of it. The first half of the fifteenth century has left us few Welsh manuscripts at all: the post-Glyndŵr economic depression in Wales was profound and long-lasting. After the Red Book, there is no significant collection of poetry before about 1450. The poetry collections which began to appear about the middle of the fifteenth century are far removed in most respects from our five books. They are generally of paper, not parchment; they are mostly home-made little books, the skills of the scriptorium largely forgotten; what they contain is the poetry of the Cywyddwyr, the poetry of the previous hundred years or so, some of it even contemporary and autograph; and their texts derive in the main, I believe, directly from oral tradition. *Hengerdd*, apart from vaticination, was not copied, nor the poems of the Gogynfeirdd. The new tradition, that of the Cywyddwyr in its full vigour, seems to have swept away interest in the older one. Such was the vitality of this new tradition that the need to make written collections seems not to have been felt until it was over a hundred years old.

As we move off through the fifteenth and into the sixteenth century the receding view of our five books allows them to stand out like distant peaks above the intervening ranges and to show their true scale. They preserve between them almost all we have of early Welsh poetry. Antiquaries of the second half of the sixteenth century discerned their value. Before 1600 all five had begun to be studied and transcribed; the slow dissemination of their precious contents was under way.

H.M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES

ISSN 0962-0702

1. D.A. Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours and Fellow-drinkers: Aspects of Community and Conflict in the Early Medieval West* (1991)
ISBN 978-0-9517339-0-5 / 0 9517339 0 7
2. Bruce Mitchell, *H.M. Chadwick, The Study of Anglo-Saxon: Fifty Years On* (1992)
ISBN 978-0-9517339-1-2 / 0 9517339 1 5
3. Pádraig Ó Riain, *Anglo-Saxon Ireland: the Evidence of the Martyrology of Tallaght* (1993)
ISBN 978-0-9517339-2-9 / 0 9517339 2 3
4. Gad Rausing, *Emperors and Popes, Kings and Bishops: Scandinavian History in the 'Dark Ages'* (1994)
ISBN 978-0-9517339-3-6 / 0 9517339 3 1
5. Peter Sawyer, *Scandinavians and the English in the Viking Age* (1995)
ISBN 978-0-9517339-4-3 / 0 9517339 4 X
6. Daniel Huws, *Five Ancient Books of Wales* (1996)
ISBN 978-0-9517339-5-0 / 0 9517339 5 8
7. Isabel Henderson, *Pictish Monsters: Symbol, Text and Image* (1997)
ISBN 978-0-9517339-6-7 / 0 9517339 6 6
8. Peter and Ursula Dronke, *Growth of Literature: the Sea and the God of the Sea* (1998)
ISBN 978-0-9532697-0-9 / 0 9532697 0 1
9. Donald Scragg, *Dating and Style in Old English Composite Homilies* (1999)
ISBN 978-0-9532697-1-6 / 0 9532697 1 X
10. Marged Haycock, *'Where Cider Ends, There Ale Begins to Reign': Drink in Medieval Welsh Poetry* (2000)
ISBN 978-0-9532697-2-3 / 0 9532697 2 8
11. Andrew Wawn, *'Fast er drukki og fátt lært': Eiríkur Magnússon, Old Northern Philology, and Victorian Cambridge* (2001)
ISBN 978-0-9532172-3-6 / 0 9532172 3 X
12. Richard Gameson, *The scribe speaks? Colophons in early English manuscripts* (2002)
ISBN 978-0-9532172-7-4 / 0 9532172 7 2
13. James Graham-Campbell, *Pictish Silver: Status and Symbol* (2002)
ISBN 978-0-9532697-5-4 / 0 9532697 5 2
14. Malcolm Godden, *The translations of Alfred and his circle, and the misappropriation of the past* (2003)
ISBN 978-1-904708-02-5 / 1 904708 02 1
15. Peter Foote, *The Early Christian Laws of Iceland: Some Observations* (2004)
ISBN 978-1-904708-12-4 / 1 904708 12 9
16. Patrick Sims-Williams, *The Iron House in Ireland* (2005)
ISBN 978-0-9532172-6-7 / 0 9532172 6 4

17. Dennis Green, *A room of their own? Women readers in the Middle Ages* (2006)
ISBN 978-0-9554568-1-7 / 0-9554568-2-7
18. Sverre Bagge, *Order, Disorder and Disordered Order: Interpretations of the World and Society from the Pagan to the Christian Period in Scandinavia* (2008)
ISBN 978-09554568-4-8
19. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (2009)
ISBN 978-9554568-9-3
20. Joseph Falaky Nagy, *Mercantile Myth in Medieval Celtic Traditions* (2010)
ISBN 978-0-9562353-6-7
21. Wendy Davies, *Water Mill and Cattle Standards: Probing the Economic Comparison between Ireland and Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (2011)
ISBN 978-0-9571862-0-0

Copies of the lectures may be obtained from the Departmental Secretary, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, Faculty of English, 9 West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DP; telephone 01223-335079.

The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic offers programmes of study, at both undergraduate and graduate level, on the pre-Norman culture of the British Isles in its various aspects: historical, literary, linguistic, palaeographical, archaeological. The Department also serves as a focal point for scholars visiting Cambridge from various parts of the world, who are attracted to Cambridge by the University Library (one of the largest in the world), the collections of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic manuscripts in the University and various college libraries, the collection of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Scandinavian coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, or the rich collection of Anglo-Saxon artefacts in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is possible for the Department to host a small number of Visiting Scholars each year.

Information on any aspect of the Department's activities can be obtained by writing to: The Head, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, Faculty of English, 9 West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DP, England.

Further information on the Department, on the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos, and on opportunities for postgraduate study, is available on the internet at www.asnc.cam.ac.uk.