

# Songs and Identity in Welsh Patagonia



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## ABSTRACT

Over the centuries there have been a number of attempts, for economic, political and religious reasons, to create Welsh settlements overseas. The most successful of these, in terms of longevity at least, and perhaps the best known of all Welsh emigration ventures, was the establishment in 1865 of a Welsh Settlement in Patagonia, in what is now the Province of Chubut in Argentina, where perhaps as many as 5,000 of the inhabitants still speak Welsh fluently or have some ability with the language. The preservation of Welsh identity was central to the Patagonian project, which aimed to create a new Welsh-speaking, self-governing Wales overseas, founded on Christian and democratic principles. From the outset, songs played an important role in fostering the ideals that inspired the founders of the Settlement, ideals that would come progressively under threat as the Argentine government increasingly asserted its authority over the Settlement, promoting Argentinian identity and replacing Welsh with Spanish as the medium of education. This paper gives an overview of the development of the Welsh Settlement in Chubut down to the present day, focussing especially on the role of song in nurturing the dream of the Settlement's founders.

## KEYWORDS:

emigration, identity, assimilation, Wales, Welsh language, Patagonia, Chubut, Argentina, Michael D. Jones, Nonconformist chapels, hymn-singing, eisteddfod, Gŵyl y Glaniad (The Landing Festival).

The nineteenth century saw over thirty million people emigrate from Europe to North America in search of a better life. However, emigration from Wales during that period was comparatively small. In the mid-nineteenth century, when the population of Wales stood at around one million, it has been estimated that there were about 50,000 Welsh immigrants living in the USA, and by the end of that century, when Wales's population had doubled to about two million, there were around 100,000 people living in the USA who were born in Wales, and were concentrated mainly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York State and Wisconsin. The reason for those small numbers, compared to, for example, immigrants from Ireland — with a total of more than four million during the nineteenth century — is that there was a large amount of internal migration within Wales itself, as people left the poorer rural areas and flocked to the new towns that were mushrooming up within the developing industrial areas, and to the iron, steel and coal towns of south-east Wales in particular. Nevertheless, there was a steady flow of migration from Wales to the New World throughout the nineteenth century, especially in times of economic depression within the heavy industries, or at times of particular crisis in the rural economy, such as the 1840s, known as the so-called 'Hungry Forties'.

The main reasons why people emigrate are economic, but there are often other factors at work, especially related to the desire for political and religious freedoms, which in turn are closely linked to matters of identity; and that was true for many of



those who emigrated from Wales in the nineteenth century. Most of the population of Wales at the time were Welsh in language and Protestant Nonconformist in religion. This contrasted sharply with the ruling classes, in rural Wales in particular, who tended to be monoglot English speakers and members of the Anglican Church, which was the official state church in Wales at the time. The nineteenth century witnessed a marked growth in political radicalism in Wales, and there was also a significant heightening in Welsh national consciousness as the nineteenth century progressed, especially as the influence of the English language and culture grew in Wales. Such developments increased the tensions between the Welsh population in general and the ruling classes, who tended to be not only English in language and culture but also Conservative in politics.

One of the most prominent among the radical Nonconformist leaders in Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century was Michael D. Jones (1822–98), principal of a theological college in Bala in north Wales and a man of strong religious and political convictions. He was an evangelical Nonconformist and a radical democrat, who placed much emphasis on social justice, freedom of conscience and the importance of nation and community. A number of Michael D. Jones's family had emigrated to America, to Ohio in particular, and in the spring of 1848, immediately after finishing his theological training, he too went to the USA, where he would stay until the following year, residing mainly in Cincinnati. One thing he noticed during his time there was that Welsh immigrants assimilated quickly into the English-speaking world around them, gradually losing their language, customs and religion; and he observed this to be true not only in Cincinnati, but wherever the Welsh settled in the populous parts of North America. Many were happy — indeed anxious — to put the 'old world' behind them and forge a new identity for themselves, but for others this loss of culture and identity was a matter of tension and regret. There had already been several attempts to establish Welsh settlements in North America, but all had failed. Michael D. Jones became convinced that if Welsh emigrants were to retain their language, culture and religion, Welsh emigration would have to be channelled to a specifically Welsh settlement in a place remote from English-speaking influences, where they would be the formative, dominant element in that community.

Michael D. Jones subsequently became the leader of a group of like-minded people who attempted to realize this objective of a Welsh-speaking, self-governing, democratic and Nonconformist Wales overseas. They considered several locations, including Oregon, Vancouver Island, Syria and Palestine, but they eventually agreed upon the Chubut Valley in Patagonia, which was at that time a very remote area of South America with no European settlements. This initial settlement would be the first step towards turning the whole of Patagonia, and not just the Chubut Valley, into a new Wales, where its language, customs and religion would thrive.

The first settlers — just over 150 in number (most of them under 40 years of age and about a quarter of them under 12) — set sail from Liverpool in May 1865 in a converted tea-clipper called the *Mimosa*. When the Welsh flag, the 'Red Dragon', was raised on the mast as they set sail, boos could be heard from English people on the dockside, but those boos turned to cheers when they heard the Welsh on board the ship beginning to sing what they thought was the anthem 'God Save the Queen!' How-



ever, had they been able to understand the words, they would have realized that it was actually a song encapsulating the dream of the early Patagonian settlers of a new, better Wales, free from English rule — but sung ironically to the tune of ‘God Save the Queen!’ That song would prove very popular and become known as the national hymn of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia. It has three verses in all. The first is a prayer to Almighty God, the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth, to protect Welsh people wherever they are in the world, on land or sea. The second verse (which was possibly added later) states that the Welsh were a conquered people who had lost their land and whose forefathers had been slain in battle, and it expresses the wish that those who had sacrificed their lives thus might rest in peace. The third verse is the best known of the three and is filled to the brim with confidence that in Patagonia they had found a better land in which their desire to live in peace, free from oppression, and to be ruled by fellow-Welshmen would be fulfilled. Here is that final verse in the original Welsh, with a literal English translation:

Ni gawsom wlad sydd well  
 Yn y Deheudir pell,  
                                   A Phatagonia yw;  
 Cawn yno fyw mewn hedd,  
 Heb ofni brad na chledd,  
 A Chymro ar y sedd:  
                                   Boed mawl i Dduw.

[We have found a better land in the far South, it is Patagonia; we shall live there in peace, without fear of treachery or the sword, and ruled by a Welshman: praise be to God.]

However, their hopes would soon be severely dented, for when they arrived at their destination on 28 July 1865, after a two-month sea voyage, they found themselves having to shelter in makeshift huts on a windswept beach in Golfo Nuevo (New Bay) in the middle of a Patagonian winter before having to trek for about forty miles over barren, uncharted steppes to reach their new home in the Chubut Valley, which was far less fertile than they had been led to believe.

During the early years it was touch and go whether the Settlement would survive. Some of the early settlers left as soon as possible, but others persisted against all odds, only enduring with the aid of provisions from the Argentine government, which was keen to see a European settlement develop there in order to strengthen its territorial claim on Patagonia, along with the help of the nomadic indigenous peoples who inhabited the area. Those indigenous peoples traded with the Welsh settlers and taught them how to hunt and navigate the terrain.

It is worth emphasizing, in passing, that on the whole, the Welsh coexisted harmoniously with the indigenous population of the Chubut area. The relationship of the Welsh with the Argentinian authorities on the one hand and the indigenous peoples on the other is a complex and contentious matter which can only be touched upon here. Michael D. Jones, for example, condemned imperialism and colonialism



vehemently and portrayed the Welsh as a conquered people who were victims of colonization, and yet some have labelled him as ‘an imperialist and a coloniser’ because of his role in the establishment of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia. The leaders of the Welsh Patagonian venture accepted the Argentinian claim of ownership of the area but hoped to establish a semi-autonomous relationship with the Argentine government. As already mentioned, the Argentinian authorities were keen for the Welsh to establish a settlement in the Chubut Valley in order to reinforce their claim on that territory, and in addition to providing the Welsh with aid of various kinds, they also paid the indigenous peoples of the area not to attack the Welsh settlers. The Welsh, for their part, were keen to live in harmony with the indigenous peoples, to respect their rights and to treat them honourably, and an amicable relationship between them was achieved to a large degree. The indigenous population preferred to trade with the Welsh, not only because it was more convenient geographically, but also because the indigenous peoples were treated more fairly and with greater respect by the Welsh. That positive relationship between the Welsh and the indigenous population was in stark contrast to the harsh persecution the indigenous peoples would suffer at the hands of the Argentine government during the infamous ‘Conquest of the Desert’ in the 1880s. Welsh sympathies at the time were with the indigenous peoples, and they protested strongly against the genocidal treatment, but to no avail since the Welsh had no political or military power or influence. It is certainly incorrect to label the Welsh as ‘settler colonialists’ in the classic use of the term, as that would imply the intentional ‘elimination of the native’ by the settler community, and there is no evidence that the Welsh in Chubut acted in that way, quite the opposite in fact; and although the Welsh treatment from the Argentinian authorities was far less brutal (to put it mildly) than that meted out to the indigenous peoples, the Welsh themselves, as we will see, were subjected to increasingly strong pressure to assimilate into Argentinian society and culture. Some have protested attempts in contemporary discourse to avoid using the word ‘colony’ to describe the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia. However, if one defines ‘colonial’ as ‘imposing one’s language and culture on others’, then the distinction between ‘colony’ and ‘settlement’ is a useful one in the context of the Welsh in Patagonia, as in general they occupied a type of ‘third space’ in Chubut, neither ‘indigenous’ nor ‘colonial’, as indicated by the fact that the indigenous population refused to call the Welsh *cristianos*, the term they used for European colonists and their descendants, but insisted rather on calling them *amigos de los Indios* (the friends of the Indians).

The early disillusionment and hardship of the Welsh settlers in the Chubut Valley is reflected in a song written in 1867, two years after they first landed, by one of their number, the Baptist minister, Robert Meirion Williams. The song was ironically set to the tune of ‘Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau’ (The Land of My Fathers), which would later be adopted as the Welsh national anthem but at the time was just coming into prominence as a popular Welsh patriotic song. Its bitterness is in stark contrast to the hope of a better land expressed in the song that had been sung so fervently aboard the *Mimosa* as they set sail from Liverpool. Far from raising the settlers from poverty, it says, the poisonous aridity and the destructive wind prevented crops from growing. Here is that scathing song, together with a literal English transla-

tion — and it will come as no surprise to learn that its author left the Settlement and returned to Wales in 1867!

Meddyliodd plant Gomer yn syber gwir sain  
Sefydldu Gwladychfa i'r Cymry, wŷr cain,  
Ar dir Patagonia, er gwella y gwan  
A'i godi o dlodi i'r lan.

Er taflu yr hadau a'r llysiâu er lles  
I'r ddaear i dyfu, doedd hynny ddim nes;  
Y sychder difaol gwenwynol a gwynt  
A'u gwywodd, ni thyfodd fel cynt.

*Cytgan:*

Gwlad, gwlad, digynnyrch yw fel gwlad;  
Di-ffrwyth a llwm bob llam o'r lle,  
O'r gogledd i'r dwyrain a'r de.

[The descendants of Gomer [i.e. the Welsh; according to tradition, they were descended from Gomer, the grandson of Noah] intended sincerely, in all truthfulness, to establish a Settlement for the Welsh, fine people, in Patagonia, to improve the lot of the weak and to raise him from poverty.

Despite sowing seeds and planting vegetables with good intent to grow in the earth, it was to no avail; the destructive, poisonous dryness and the wind caused them to wither, and not to grow as before.

*Refrain:*

Land, land, it is an unproductive land; the place is sterile and bare everywhere, from the north to the east and the south.]

Within these two extremes of early Patagonian Welsh songs, we have examples of the two extremes of hope and disenchantment which characterize songs with the theme of emigration which are to be found on Welsh ballad sheets in the nineteenth century; for while some are positive — encouraging people to go to America, for example, where everything is on a grander scale — one frequently finds songs that express a longing for home and regret for ever having left. There are even examples of the negative and the positive in the same poem, as in the one entitled *Cynadledd Rhwng Un am Fyned i Awstralia, a'r Llall am Aros Gartref* (A Debate Between One Wanting to Go to Australia, and the Other Wanting to Stay at Home), published in 1857, where two friends argue the merits and disadvantages of emigrating to Australia.

The Patagonian settlers would not have been surprised with what faced them if they had heeded Charles Darwin's words in a diary entry in August 1833 during his voyage on HMS *Beagle*, when he prophesied that the 'inhospitable' plains of that region would 'for ever remain nearly useless to mankind' because of their 'very sterile





appearance'. However, around the time that R. M. Williams's caustic song was proclaiming that their new land was 'sterile and bare everywhere', the Welsh settlers began to create irrigation channels from the Chupat (or Chubut) river which runs through the valley. With great diligence and much physical labour, they eventually created a network of canals throughout the Lower Chubut Valley, turning it into fertile land. Indeed, they were so successful that by 1889 grain from the valley was beginning to win international prizes for its quality.

Indicative of the change in fortunes that was afoot by the mid-1870s, is another song set to the tune of 'Mae Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau' (The Land of My Fathers). It was written by Lewis Evans, who emigrated to the Settlement in Patagonia from Ffestiniog, in north-west Wales, in 1874. That song, entitled 'Gwlad Newydd y Cymry' (The New Land of the Welsh), was published in the following year, 1875, as the final item in a volume reporting on the situation of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia. The author of that report, Rev. David Stephen Davies, a keen supporter of the Patagonian project who was in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, when it was published, painted a very rosy picture of the Settlement in the report, and it would be difficult to imagine a more positive note on which to conclude that volume than Lewis Evans's song, with its enthusiastic and unequivocal reaffirmation of the 'Patagonian dream' of the Settlement's founders

Y mae Patagonia yn annwyl i mi,  
Gwlad newydd y Cymry mwyneiddlon yw hi;  
Anadlu gwir ryddid a gawn yn y wlad,  
O gyrraedd gormesiaeth a brad.

*Cytgan:*

Gwlad, gwlad, pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad;  
Tra haul y nen uwchben ein pau,  
O! bydded i'r Wladfa barhau.

Bu'r Cymry yn gorwedd dan ddirmyg yn drwch,  
Wel, diolch am Wladfa i'n codi o'r llwch;  
Ein heniaith a gadwn mewn urddas a bri,  
Tra'r Gamwy'n ddisgleiriol ei lli.

'Chaiff Cymro byth mwyach ymostwng i Sais, —  
Terfynodd ei orthrwm — distawyd ei lais;  
Y Wladfa fawrygwn tra'r Andes wen fawr,  
A'i chorun yn 'stafell y wawr.

[Patagonia is dear to me, it is the new land of the amiable, happy Welsh people; we will be able to breathe true freedom in the land, out of the reach of oppression and betrayal.]

*Refrain:*

Land, land, I support my land; for as long as the sky's sun rises over our country, Oh! may the Settlement continue.

The Welsh had been lying under heavy derision, well, thanks be for a Settlement to raise us from the dust; we will keep in honour and esteem our ancient language for as long as the Chubut river's flow is bright.

Never again will a Welshman submit to an Englishman, — his oppression has ended — his voice has been silenced; we will extol the Settlement for as long as the great white Andes stands with its summit in the dawn's room.]

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Welsh Settlement in Chubut experienced something of a golden age, not only economically, but also as a place where Welsh flourished as the main language of the community. In that period, Welsh was the language of education, religion, local government, commerce and cultural life in general, and it looked as if the vision of a new Welsh-speaking Wales overseas would be realised. But with economic success came the seeds of failure. People from other parts of Argentina (of Spanish and Italian extraction in particular) began to pour in from the mid-1890s onward, and by the First World War around two-thirds of the population of the Chubut Valley were of non-Welsh descent. The Argentine government began to involve itself increasingly in the life of the Settlement. Crucially, it took control of elementary education in the Settlement turning the schools, by the end of the nineteenth century, from being Welsh-medium to being Spanish. Immigration from Wales ceased to a large extent by the First World War, and with no significant injection of new Welsh speakers from the 'Old Country', together with the great influx of non-Welsh speakers and the increasing emphasis by the Argentine government on assimilation, the Welsh language and its culture went into steep decline in the mid-twentieth century, with Welsh becoming virtually excluded from public life and its use restricted, for all intents and purposes, to the home and chapel. Things looked very bleak for the fortunes of the Welsh language in Chubut, and by the 1970s there was a common perception that it would soon die.

However, there has been a remarkable change in the fortunes of the Welsh language in Chubut in recent years. Its beginnings can be traced to the steady growth of contact between Wales and Chubut since the Second World War, helped significantly by increasingly easier and cheaper means of transport and communication, and latterly by the development of social media. Changes in government policy have led to less emphasis on assimilation and more on cultural diversity, and to a new appreciation of the pioneering role of the Welsh in Patagonia. One important factor is that Chubut became a separate province of Argentina in the 1950s, which has led to a more vigorous promotion of provincial identity in which both the Welsh and the indigenous peoples are afforded privileged positions.

All this helped fuel the significant upsurge of interest in Welsh language and culture which has been experienced in Chubut since the 1990s, not to mention a heightened interest on the part of people in Wales itself in what is often perceived as a rather







exotic, romantic expression of Welshness in the remote expanses of Patagonia. It is difficult to give accurate figures, but there are perhaps as many as 5,000 people in Chubut today who can speak Welsh (with a Spanish lilt!) or have at least some knowledge of the language. They form only a small bilingual minority and Spanish is very much the dominant community language, but there is now a strong Welsh-learner movement there, with hundreds attending classes, and three bilingual (Welsh/Spanish) primary schools have been established in recent years — the first time that children have received formal education through the medium of Welsh in Argentina in over a hundred years!

The Welsh settlers took with them to Patagonia their cultural practices and institutions and 150 years on these are still maintained, to a degree, and have indeed been given a new lease of life of late as a result of the revival of interest in Chubut in all things Welsh. Key among those cultural institutions was, and is, the chapel. Given that an important motivation behind the establishment of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia was the preservation and promotion of Welsh Nonconformist Christianity, it is not surprising that Nonconformist chapel worship would be a central feature of community life in the Settlement from the outset. On the very first Sunday after the settlers' arrival in the Chubut Valley, a religious service was held in a hastily erected storehouse, where the preacher took as the subject of his sermon that most apposite story from the book of Exodus, in which the children of Israel journeyed through the wilderness. The congregation, again very aptly, then sang the popular Welsh hymn, 'O fryniau Caersalem ceir gweled holl daith yr anialwch i gyd' (From Jerusalem's mountains the whole journey of the desert will be seen), which tells how Christian believers will one day ascend to heaven and see clearly from the mountains of the spiritual Promised Land the purpose behind the trials and tribulations which faced them on their labyrinthine path through the desert of this world.

The settlers built a network of Nonconformist chapels in the Lower Chubut Valley (and in the smaller Welsh Settlement in the Andes, which was established in the late 1880s), and these would play a pivotal role in the religious and communal life of the Settlement over the years. A number still survive today and are a notable architectural feature of the Chubut Valley. As such, they receive substantial support from the Chubut provincial government towards their upkeep, and in addition to their continuing contribution to religious and social life, they have become tourist attractions, indicative of the importance of the history and traditions of the Welsh settlers within the heritage industry of the region. Although many of the chapel services are now in Spanish, some are still held in Welsh or bilingually, and there has been a small but significant increase in the use of Welsh of late.

One religious and cultural phenomenon that became very popular in Wales from the mid-nineteenth century onward is the 'hymn-singing festival' — the 'cymanfa ganu' — and Welsh emigrants have taken such festivals with them wherever they have gone. This was true of Patagonia, and the 'cymanfa ganu' remains a regular feature of religious and cultural life there today; and although, as is the case with chapel worship in general, such festivals now feature hymns in Spanish as well as Welsh, the singing of Welsh hymns in both chapel worship and hymn-singing festivals throughout the years has been a perpetual reminder of the Settlement's Welsh roots and heritage.



Another popular phenomenon that grew apace in Wales in the nineteenth century, and which again has been taken by Welsh emigrants to all corners of the globe, is the competitive cultural festival called the 'eisteddfod' (which may be literally translated as an 'assembly' or 'gathering'). The 'eisteddfod' (plural: 'eisteddfodau') is a cornerstone of Welsh cultural life. Its roots go back to the medieval period, when it was a gathering of professional bards which set poetic standards and agreed on rules and regulations, although it also included a competitive element for poets and musicians. Following the demise of the professional bardic order in the early modern period, the 'eisteddfod' gradually developed into an occasion where members of the public would gather to watch poets and musicians perform and compete. It became an increasingly popular feature of Welsh life, both locally and regionally, during the nineteenth century, culminating in the creation of a 'National Eisteddfod of Wales' in 1861. The National Eisteddfod is an annual week-long peripatetic event, alternating between north and south Wales and acting as 'the cultural capital of Wales' for that week; and while the traditional focus on literary and musical competitions remains a central feature, the activities now encompass a wide range of arts and crafts. However, the National Eisteddfod is but the 'tip of the iceberg', since a plethora of smaller 'eisteddfodau' are held regularly in all parts of Wales and beyond and in a variety of contexts, with a good number specifically targeting young people. Not surprisingly, given its popularity in Wales both at the time of the establishment of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia and subsequently, the 'eisteddfod', like the 'cymanfa ganu', became a feature of Patagonian Settlement life which persists to this day, and although many of the competitions at these events are now in Spanish, some are still in Welsh. Indeed, Welsh-language competitions have increased in number in recent years, paralleling the growth in Chubut of the Welsh-learner movement and of Welsh-medium education.

It is important to emphasize that although Welsh speakers in Chubut regard Wales with much affection, they consider themselves to be Argentinians of Welsh extraction rather than Welsh and would, for example, support the Pumas rather than Wales in rugby. Cultural practices inevitably develop in different directions when transplanted by emigrants into new surroundings, and this is true of the Welsh culture of Chubut, for although bearing many similarities to the Welsh culture of Wales because of the common roots, it has of course developed in a very different geographical and societal context: a flat terrain, for the most part, with mile upon mile of dusty, brown and fairly sterile steppes, as compared to Wales's mountains, rain and greenery, and with Spanish rather than English as the dominant, all-pervasive language and culture. Even during the early years of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia, when the Welsh language was dominant, the settlers' culture, customs and way of life, and indeed the very form of the Welsh language which they used daily, were beginning to diverge from those of the 'Old Country', as they affectionately called Wales, as a consequence of the very different context in which they now lived; and this divergence would accelerate in later generations (i.e. among those who were born in Argentina with no first-hand experience of Wales). It is a place, as I have said already, where Welsh is spoken with a Spanish lilt, and where the guitar, the asado, the gaucho and the siesta are part and parcel of Welsh-Argentinian culture. To a visitor from Wales,





it can feel as though you are entering a rather surreal ‘parallel universe’; and the fusion of Welsh and Argentinian customs — such as the performance of the tango at an ‘eisteddfod’ — is something of a culture shock, to say the least, to someone from Wales visiting Chubut for the first time!

In addition to cultural practices which stem from Wales, such the ‘*cymanfa ganu*’ and the ‘*eisteddfod*’, one also finds in Chubut new Welsh cultural practices which do not emanate from the ‘Old Country’. One prominent Patagonian Welsh tradition that has no parallel in Wales is ‘*Gŵyl y Glaniad*’ (The Landing Festival), held annually on 28 July to celebrate the arrival of the original Welsh settlers in 1865. This festival — which is, one must remember, a winter festival in Chubut — has been celebrated regularly over the past 150 years by communities up and down the Chubut Valley and in the smaller Welsh Settlement in the Andes, not to mention by some people in Wales and among the Patagonian Welsh diaspora elsewhere in Argentina and beyond. Again, like other ‘Welsh’ customs in Patagonia, the Landing Festival would with time come increasingly under wider Argentinian influences. For example, by the beginning of the twentieth century the Argentinian National Anthem had begun to be sung as part of the festivities, and increasingly from about the time of the First World War, Spanish would become the dominant language of the celebrations (although as in the case of other Patagonian Welsh customs, the Welsh language has become more prominent again over recent decades). Increasingly, the Landing Festival came to be celebrated also by the wider community and not only by the descendants of the Welsh, culminating in the 1950s with 28 July being declared a public holiday for the whole Chubut Province. One striking development from 2000 onward has been a re-enactment of the original landing on the beach near Puerto Madryn where the first Welsh settlers set foot in Patagonia. The celebrations held there in 2015, on the 150th anniversary of that first landing, were particularly impressive, with crowds on the beach, many in period costume, welcoming the landing party, and among them, significantly, were representatives of the indigenous peoples.

Over the years, Landing celebrations have included various types of entertainment, the most common features being a meal, games and a concert. Patriotic songs would often be written specifically for the occasion, extolling the praises of the pioneer Welsh settlers and reminding people of their vision. One example must suffice, namely a song popular until about the mid-twentieth century, which was written by one of the most prominent of the early Welsh settlers, Richard Jones (1837–1917), who added the surname ‘*Berwyn*’ to his name because he was a native of that mountain range in north-east Wales. R. J. Berwyn became an enthusiastic supporter of the movement to establish a Welsh Settlement in Patagonia and was a member of the first group of settlers to land there in 1865. He has been described as ‘one of the ablest, most versatile of the Settlement’s leaders’ and among his many positions he served as teacher, postmaster and coroner. He and his wife, Elizabeth, had thirteen children, giving them names in alphabetical order, starting with the seven Welsh vowels followed by the first six consonants. Berwyn’s song for the Landing celebrations was aimed specifically at the younger generation, and it explains, by way of questions and answers between children and their father, why he and the other settlers had come to Patagonia, namely ‘to keep our language alive and to make a better home’;



the song ends with the children affirming their commitment to cherish their parents' language and traditions, which had been brought from the 'Old Country', but also expressing their love for the new country in which they were born — thus displaying, consciously or unconsciously, the tensions that are inherent for the children of immigrants. Here are the last four verses of that six-verse song, with a literal English translation:

'O ble y daethoch yma?  
 O! dwedwch i ni, 'Nhad,  
 A pham y myn'soch Wladfa  
 Ym Mhatagonia wlad?'

'O hen fynyddoedd Cymru,  
 Dros foroedd llydain pell,  
 I gadw'n hiaith i fyny  
 A gwneuthur cartref gwell.'

Wel, caru wnawn y Wladfa,  
 Ddewisodd Mam a 'Nhad,  
 A gwnawn eu cartref yma  
 Yn gartref o foddhad.

A charwn iaith ein mamau  
 A defion pur ein tad;  
 I ninnau anwyd yma,  
 O! dyma'n hannwyl wlad.

[‘From whence did you come here? Oh, tell us, Father, and why did you seek a Settlement in the land of Patagonia?'

‘From the old mountains of Wales, over wide distant seas, to keep our language alive and to make a better home.’

Well, we will love the Settlement chosen by Mother and Father, and we will make their home here a home of contentment.

And we will love our mothers' tongue and the pure customs of our father; to us, who were born here, Oh, this is our dear land.]

Partly because of the tenacity with which some of the original Welsh settlers and their descendants held on to the 'Patagonian dream' of a new Welsh-speaking Wales in South America, the Welsh language and Welsh traditions have survived in Chubut into the fifth and sixth generations, much longer than in the case of any other Welsh immigrant community. And this can, I believe, be attributed in part to song. Despite the increasing dominance of Spanish in the community, the singing of hymns and



other songs in Welsh continued throughout the years in various contexts, both formal and informal, and were a constant reminder of the existence of the language and its traditional place in the Settlement. Furthermore, as we have seen, through the annual Landing festivals and the songs sung on those occasions, the descendants of the original settlers were regularly reminded of the aims and aspirations of the founding fathers and mothers. And through this we are reminded — if students of ballads and popular song, of all people, should need reminding! — of the power of song.

### Note

This paper draws substantially on sections of a lecture I delivered in London in November 2015 to the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, although the present paper has more of a focus on song than the original version. That lecture, to mark the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the Patagonian Settlement in 1865, was entitled 'Identity, Immigration, and Assimilation: The Case of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia' and was published in the *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, new series, vol. 24 (2018). It is also available electronically: [https://www.cymmrodorion.org/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce\\_uploads/2021/01/Identity-Immigration-and-assimilation-exkg90.pdf](https://www.cymmrodorion.org/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2021/01/Identity-Immigration-and-assimilation-exkg90.pdf)

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