

Location and Dislocation: Ireland, Scotland and Wales in their Insular Alignment

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I AM HONOURED but not a little alarmed by the invitation to give this lecture.¹ Although I have held Chairs of History in Scotland and Wales, I have never held a Chair in Irish, Scottish or Welsh Studies and, with advancing years, it is probably too late to suppose that I ever will. Elsewhere, in this centenary series, David Cannadine has already delivered specific thoughts on ‘History’ and the British Academy has recently published ‘a retrospective volume about history and historians in Britain in the twentieth century’ edited by Peter Burke. It is not my brief to discuss historiography as such but rather to reflect, as a modern historian, on the history of Ireland, Scotland and Wales over the past century; to comment on how that history has been presented in historiography; and to consider present, and possibly future, developments. Only the succinct and snappy title that I have provided could adequately describe such an agenda! It is obvious, further, that a solitary lecture cannot attempt this task comprehensively. My strategy, therefore, is as follows. Initially, I address the ‘problematic’ which confronts any author who seeks to focus on ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’. I then to try to ‘locate’ Ireland, Scotland and Wales in

Read at the University of Aberdeen 5 November 2002.

¹ The references which accompany this text do not purport to be comprehensive and have largely been confined to recent publications. It may be pertinent to remark, however, that one of this author’s problems in compiling *Bibliography of British History 1914–1989* (Oxford, 1996) lay in determining (in insular terms) what actually constituted ‘British History’ and how its diversity and commonality should be bibliographically structured.

Proceedings of the British Academy, 122, 163–180. © The British Academy 2004.

the year 1902, the year of the Academy's foundation. Fast-forwarding, I comment on the 'dislocations' which have occurred over the subsequent century and reflect on 'relocations' as they appear in 2002.

Best of British?

A sense that it is presently important to address these issues has been fortified by a reading of the essays in Peter Burke's volume which has just been referred to. I note that his contributors are all based in English universities, with the exception of Peter Clark who is now based in Helsinki. The 'overview of the development of British historical writing in the twentieth century' which has been published does not in fact concern itself with **British** historical writing in this period—unless we assume, as has not infrequently been assumed, that English historical writing is in fact British historical writing. Of course, the ten admirable essays in this new volume could not cover all the areas that 'British historians' have studied in the course of the century with which it is concerned. Burke reasonably decided to focus on a 'few major topics'—periods (such as the Middle Ages), regions (such as 'the Orient'), disciplines (art history, historiography or historical demography) or themes (nation, class, disease, gender). Quite so—but what is striking in these essays is that no contributor strays, except very marginally, into non-English insular history in search of illustration or example. One might even conclude that there is not thought to be any place for British historical writing in the twentieth century which has been written in the United Kingdom outside England. There are indeed aspects of the identified 'major topics' which could have been written about by referring to non-English material, but they are ignored. It has apparently not crossed the editor's mind, a mind normally so eager to pursue cross-cultural comparison and interaction, that there is anything odd in presenting the otherwise illuminating pieces in his volume as an overview of history and historians in twentieth-century **Britain**. It scarcely needs to be added that the island of Ireland is only fleetingly sighted, although Sir Tony Wrigley does remark that 'no one living in the British Isles needs to be reminded that Ireland, with a population of about eight millions, suffered approximately one million additional deaths from starvation and related diseases in the potato famine of the later 1840s and lost a further one million to emigration during the same period'.² One suspects, however, that there

² Peter Burke (ed.), *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), p. 160.

may in fact be millions in the contemporary British Isles, though not in Ireland, who contrive to live in total ignorance of this fact! Certainly, what stands out from this volume is that British historical writing, for most of the century, has not exhibited any disposition to take seriously and systematically the awkwardly and ambiguously conjoined history of two large islands existing 'offshore' from a continental 'mainland'—a mainland, however, which has been dubiously recognised as such. Thus, while there are studies of particular topics within particular periods, no historian has systematically explored the totality of the relationship between Britain and Ireland over the entire twentieth century.³ What is noteworthy too, in our context, is the extent to which such books as have appeared have scarcely ever addressed the many-sided aspects of insular relationships—that is to say looked at relationships within Ireland (seen as both a single and a divided construct) and within Britain, (likewise seen as both a single and a divided construct) as part and parcel of the process of considering the relationship between 'Ireland' and 'Britain'.⁴ In this respect the use of the word 'Anglo-' has resulted in obfuscation. Whereas in the past, 'Anglo-' has often been equated with 'British' (e.g. 'the Anglo-Irish Agreement') it should perhaps now, given the newly affirmed territories of the United Kingdom, be restricted to its obvious origins and to refer only to 'English'. There are particularities in the relationships between all of the present constitutional entities within 'the islands' which cannot and should not be obscured by using the term 'Anglo-Irish' in any contemplation of the two large islands in their relationship with each other.⁵

³ Eunan O'Halpin, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland* (Dublin, 1987); P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Ireland and Britain since 1922* (Cambridge, 1986); Sheila Lawlor, *Britain and Ireland, 1914–1923* (Dublin, 1983).

⁴ James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity since 1885* (London, 1995) is an exception.

⁵ e.g. Hugh Shearman, *Anglo-Irish Relations* (London, 1948) or Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s* (London, 1984). The new *Short Oxford History of the British Isles* can be said to adopt a more multilateral approach. Paul Langford, the general editor, argues in the common preface to each volume that whatever the complexities and ambiguities inherent in such an enterprise an overview extending to the whole of the British Isles is now historiographically desirable. He recognises that use of the word 'British' might still be thought to imply an unacceptable politics of dominion but believes that there is no other formulation which can encapsulate the shared experience of 'these islands'. See Keith Robbins, *The British Isles 1901–1951* (Oxford, 2002).

Perceiving the problem

We are concerned with place and the perception of place. A special lecture which in some sense seeks the 'incorporation' of Irish, Scottish and Welsh Studies into a centenary celebratory series which has its focus on particular disciplines is in itself almost a recognition that, without a slot of their own, 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales' might not feature in the other disciplinary overviews. Their absence from a 'mainstream' retrospective of British historical writing and historiography has just been noted. That they needed a space of their own in the programme, however, seems to provide confirmation of the perception of their 'peripheral' character. It is an aspect of the question which we shall be addressing, however, that there is no specific place which stands out as the self-evident location for considering this particular triangular connection. A lecture given in Belfast, Cardiff, Dublin or Edinburgh for this purpose might be thought likely to arouse expectations of a particular 'spin' to suit the sensibilities of 'capital' audiences. The geographical position of Aberdeen, facing the north-eastern sea, does not automatically suggest itself as a city which conjures up 'Ireland, Scotland and Wales', though of course it has its Highland hinterland. Indeed, it may be that its location does offer a suitable vantage point for a reflection of this kind in so far as it is a recognition there is no one location which all three countries would recognise as self-evidently 'central' to their complex relationship. That, in turn, leads on to asking what sense there is, if any, in the supposition that 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales' does constitute some kind of totality, properly brought together under one banner for academic scrutiny. Is it the case that there is some intrinsic if as yet inadequately perceived commonality which makes 'Ireland, Scotland and Wales' a single subject for investigation? Or, do we only consider them together because, negatively, they share some element of unity which derives from the fact that they have all been 'in bed with the elephant', that they share the experience of being 'not England' but of living, perhaps inescapably, in the shadow of England? It is convenient, but not culturally or politically convincing, some might say, to conjoin the examination of these countries in the way required here. If so, there may be an additional element of folly in asking an Englishman, albeit one who has been an 'expatriate' for thirty years, to tackle the topic.

Beyond 'the Fringe'

Of course, one way in which such a totality might be asserted is to make use of the word 'Celtic' and to talk of these three countries possessing a primordial 'family relationship'. The word Celtic is indeed very useful as a shorthand term. It gets round the cumbersome accumulation of 'Ireland, Scotland and Wales' used in this lecture (not to mention, additionally, in other contexts, Man, Cornwall and Brittany). Few, however, will need any reminder of just how problematic a word it is. This is not the place to reopen the argument about 'the Celts', even if I had sufficient expertise to make any useful contribution to the debate. 'Pan-Celticism', once it takes off beyond the area of linguistic relationships can take us into mysterious, not to say mythical realms.⁶ We may well wish to exercise extreme caution before we accept that it is some fundamental 'Celticness' which intuitively promotes mutual understanding amongst 'Celts' against 'Others'. Scepticism about 'Celticism' does not, of course, mean that it cannot be a fact of political importance. The term 'the Celtic fringe' has had, and continues to have, considerable currency at various levels of usage. If the attribution is correct, it is to A. J. Balfour in 1907 that we owe the coinage of the term, and for nearly a century it has been regularly employed in various contexts.⁷ Being a well-connected Anglo-Scot, it is not clear, however, that Balfour thought of himself as much of a fringe person. The term's enduring utility, at least when used in England, testifies to the assumption that whatever 'the English' are they are not 'Celts' and also the assumption that since it has been England which has been the dominant element in the insular polity, whatever is beyond England constitutes a 'fringe'.

We might want to argue, however, that it is not so much a common 'Celticism' which gives 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales' such shared identity as they possess but rather a shared 'fringeness' in relation to a metropolitan cultural/political capital located 'elsewhere'. In so far as a common mind-set might be thought to exist among them, it has derived not from some supposedly shared ethnicity but from a long sense of alienation, exclusion or marginality—with the shared strategies, to some extent of resistance,

⁶ M. Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (London, 1992); S. James, *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (London, 1999); C. Morash, 'Celticism: between race and culture' *Irish Review*, no. 20 (Winter/Spring, 1997), 29–36; T. Brown (ed.), *Celticism* (Amsterdam, 1996).

⁷ Christopher Harvie, 'Larry Doyle and Captain MacWhirr: The Engineer and the Celtic Fringe' in G. H. Jenkins (ed.), *Cymru a'r Cymry 2000/Wales and the Welsh 2000* (Aberystwyth, 2001), p. 119.

political or cultural, that have evolved to cope with this condition. In so far, then, as the 'fringe' acted in concert, it did so not from any inherent predisposition derived from common Celticism (however much, on occasion, that might provide a certain ideological cement) but rather from the solidarity of the subordinate within the polity of the United Kingdom. Such 'common cause' as existed, however, was invariably fragile and insubstantial. In addition, within the trio, until quite late in the twentieth century, in comparison with the other two, 'Wales' has been virtually invisible in a formal constitutional or administrative sense in comparison with either Ireland or Scotland, a mere principality in comparison with two kingdoms. In 1901, for the first time, the population of Ireland was reduced to parity with that of Scotland (that of Wales being a little less than half that of either). In aggregate, the three countries contained a quarter of the population of the United Kingdom. Until the second half of the century, Wales also lacked a capital city and many of the institutional manifestations of distinctiveness which could be found in Dublin or Edinburgh.⁸ Unlike Ireland or Scotland, Wales had no 'territorial' presence in the United Kingdom Cabinet. Whatever 'Wales' was, therefore, it was clearly inferior to the 'big two' and its politicians scarcely players, in comparison with Scots, in the high politics of British government. Scotland, for Wales, was (and is) a distant exemplar of a status it might have achieved rather than intimate associate. Wales had to be 'located' by rather different means.⁹ To state what is obvious, the geo-politics of 'The Isles' dictated a widely differing set of multilateral relationships and militated against the consolidation of a contiguous fringe. Scotland and Wales have not neighboured each other, but neighboured England. Sea has separated Ireland from Scotland and Wales. Ireland has not directly neighboured England.¹⁰ In earlier eras, when sea communication was paramount, the 'Irish Sea area' did have some coherence.¹¹ By the end of

⁸ Any more extended comparison of the structures, roles, functions and relationships of insular capitals within the shifting governmental arrangements of 'The Isles' such as has been begun in Peter Clark and Raymond Gillespie, *Two Capitals: London and Dublin 1500–1840* (Oxford, 2002) would find Cardiff as a newcomer. Although a seat of government, strictly speaking Belfast is not a 'capital' since Northern Ireland is not a 'country', at least not in the sense that England, Scotland and Wales are 'countries'.

⁹ Keith Robbins, 'Cultural Independence and Political Devolution in Wales' in H. T. Dickinson and Michael Lynch (eds.), *The Challenge to Westminster: Sovereignty, Devolution and Independence* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 81–90.

¹⁰ Conor Cruise O'Brien in his *Neighbours* (London, 1980) is one of the few writers to seek to explore what might be involved in 'neighbouring'.

¹¹ Wendy Davies, *Whithorn and the World* (Whithorn, 1998) gives a recent picture of the 'Irish Sea' area before 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales', as we conceive those countries today, existed.

the nineteenth century, road and rail had diminished whatever significance the sea area had possessed as some kind of *Kulturgebiet*. ‘Ireland, Scotland and Wales’ linked together in Celtic consolidation against the ‘Other’ of England did not enter the realm of hard political reality. The Celtic Congresses, moving between appropriate locations, testified to a rather more general expression of, or aspiration towards, cultural unity.¹²

There is, therefore, a degree of artificiality in trying to think about ‘Ireland, Scotland and Wales’ within a common framework and forgetting, as it were, that England exists. It makes no sense to talk about ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’ as though we could ignore its central existence. Apart from the intrinsic interest of the individual histories of the countries, what gives additional point to reflecting about them together—though apart from this occasion it is very rarely done in the case of all three—lies in the fact that we are dealing with a set of accommodations/resistances stemming from the common experience of encountering England and influences emanating from England. How this encounter played varied within and between the three countries, but it was arguably more significant as an interaction than that directly between the three countries themselves. However, it would be wrong to place the emphasis in this interaction exclusively upon ‘reception’ as though the cultural traffic took place only in one direction.

It would also be wrong to believe that an evaluation of ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’ should confine itself to the territorial confines of these countries. England hosted the substantial presence of insular expatriate populations. For some time, historians have given most attention to the presence of Irish-born or Irish-descended populations in Britain.¹³ One recent publication has, however, looked at the Welsh in London in the five centuries after 1500.¹⁴ Publication on the Scots as a not inconsiderable element in the life of England at a multiplicity of levels is surprisingly limited. The point to be stressed is that the borders of England were porous. England was predominantly an importer rather than an exporter of insular peoples (though there were pockets of ‘incomers’ in Scotland and considerable numbers from south-west England in particular in South Wales

¹² M. Löffler, *A Book of Mad Celts: John Wickens and the Celtic Congress of Caernarfon 1904* (*John Wickens a Chyngres Geltaidd Caernarfon 1904*) (Llandysul, 2000); John Belchem (ed.), *A New History of the Isle of Man: Volume V: The Modern Period, 1830–1999* (Liverpool, 2000), p. 13.

¹³ S. Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880–1939* (Milton Keynes, 1993); Donald MacRàild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750–1922* (Basingstoke, 1999).

¹⁴ Emrys Jones (ed.), *The Welsh in London 1500–2000* (Cardiff, 2001).

during the boom years of the coal industry) but it may be noted that while there are studies of ‘Celtic’ incomers into England, the English outside England (in the twentieth century) do not seem to attract attention. Of course this insular relocation was predominantly an urban phenomenon. ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’ was a kind of presence in England (as it was in the settled parts of the British Empire) in some degree of contiguity. It is in the city of Liverpool that the interplay of ethnic, religious, social and economic structures continues to be most closely studied. John Belchem, for example, has most recently reflected on the factors involved in the maintenance and dissolution of hyphenated identities in that city. He has concluded that the Irish remained ‘the internal “other” against whom the otherwise “non-ethnic” English defined themselves’.¹⁵ The 1907 tableaux, which celebrated the seven-hundredth anniversary of Liverpool’s foundation, had few Celtic references, though the ‘Great Car of Liverpool’, which brought the procession to an end, had a figure of *Britannia* with Trident in front and *Erin* with Harp at the rear. There was little sign of any disposition on the part of the resident Irish, Scots and Welsh collectively to challenge the English ‘natives’. The Welsh maintained a vigorous religious and cultural life, but kept themselves substantially separate by language, and for this and other reasons, Liverpool could reasonably be thought of as the ‘capital’ of at least North Wales. It is scarcely tenable, therefore, to suppose that the study of ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’ is something that should be territorially confined. Indeed, one might go further and argue against a historiography of ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’ as an aggregate made up of building blocs erected on ‘national territory’ and which ignores the interpenetrating experience of toing and froing, location and dislocation, exile and return, distancing and *hiraeth* which brought ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’ into England. It may be as important to hold within the same investigative frame the history of Liverpool and Glasgow, Belfast and Bristol, Cardiff and Dundee (to give but a few examples) rather than to consider these cities discretely as simply English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh only appropriately considered within national spaces.¹⁶ And a fortiori would this be true of London as remaining a ‘capital of capitals’ within these islands.

¹⁵ John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* (Liverpool, 2000), p. 151.

¹⁶ T. M. Devine (ed.), *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Edinburgh, 1991); Paul O’Leary, *Immigration and Integration: The Irish in Wales, 1798–1922* (Cardiff, 2000); John Lynch, *A Tale of Three Cities: Comparative Studies in Working-Class Life* (Basingstoke, 1998). In looking at Bristol, Belfast and Dublin, Lynch argues that, up until 1914, Bristol and Belfast were ‘similar’ but Dublin could not really be compared with them, pp. 174–5.

Founding a British Academy, 1902

It was in such an evolving United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the insular progenitor of the global British Empire, that the British Academy was founded in 1902. In an era in which university vice-chancellors and principals are daily urged to address ways in which their institutions can contribute to economic and social revitalisation and regeneration, we may note that the Academy's origins do not lie in any academic desire to address in some utilitarian fashion the crisis which the South African War represented. There was indeed public apprehension that the new century might see challenges to Britain's global role and some speculation that the Titan was weary. The origins of the Academy however, are not to be found in such profound ruminations. They lie, rather, in the fact that in the very month in which the war began, October 1899, a proposal, largely European in inspiration, to establish an International Association of Academies looked likely to make progress and, in so doing, cause complications. As the Secretaries of the Royal Society of London wrote to certain 'distinguished men of letters' in November 1899, it had become clear that there was no learned society in England which dealt at a comparable level with subjects embraced by the 'Literary' section of continental bodies. The United Kingdom would embarrassingly only be represented in Science. Accordingly, exchanges and discussions took place which led to the formation of the Academy a few months after the South African War ended. We note that gentlemen present at a meeting at the British Museum in June 1901 were concerned about the apparent absence of 'England' from this association unless something was done. However, in the event, it was not an 'English' but a 'British' Academy which was formed. The Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Irish Academy, located in Edinburgh and Dublin respectively, might perhaps have jibbed at this title—it would appear that only the latter body expressed some anxiety that its rights and privileges might be infringed by this newcomer. If, however, there was vigorous debate concerning the title I am not aware of it. What had been formed was a British Academy to function in a United Kingdom which was still a British/Irish unitary state, the hub of the vast though unexpectedly challenged British Empire. Potential Irish fellows, in the absence of an alternative adjective, had to stomach the word British.

It would be unwise to derive too many conclusions from scrutinising the initial fellowship, but nevertheless to do so is not without interest in the overall context of this lecture. The founding fathers were not all

Englishmen, or holders of academic posts in England, though the great majority did fall into this fortunate category. Those holding academic posts in England did so, with one exception, at Oxford and Cambridge. Two Edinburgh professors and, gratifying to this audience, one Aberdeen professor constituted the Scottish academic contingent (though other Scots—Edward Caird and A. M. Fairbairn—held posts in Oxford. John Rhÿs, formidable philologist, inhabited the Cambrian outpost that was Jesus College, Oxford and the Chair of Celtic at that university. The three Scottish-domiciled Scots were matched by three Irish academics—all from Dublin. Amongst the other founding notables without academic position, however, only John Morley can be thought unambiguously English. Rosebery, Reay, A. J. Balfour and James Bryce had little doubt that they were Scots, whatever others might think. Bryce, who played such an important part in establishing the Academy, was within a few years briefly to be Irish Chief Secretary. Lecky, who had lamented what he considered the signal failure of England in governing a neighbouring island but was equally strongly opposed to Irish Home Rule, added an Irish Unionist voice in the year of life that was left to him.¹⁷ There was, therefore, a significant non-English presence. It was not suggested, however, that they would promote ‘Irish/Scottish/Welsh’ Studies as a particular province of the Academy. When James Frazer, now London-based, pressed on the Academy the importance of anthropological field expeditions to investigate ‘savages’ it was not the inhabitants of his native Helensburgh that he had in mind.¹⁸ We may conclude, therefore, that, however fortuitously, this collection of fellows could be taken to be ‘representative’ of the insular academic/intellectual linkages of the era.

Mobilising multiple identities

The Academy was formed in a unitary state but one which was a union of multiple identities. The politicians in its ranks were certainly aware of the stresses and strains to which it was being subjected, though it is unlikely that any of them could have predicted accurately the timing and form of its disruption. It did seem self-evident, however, that such restructuring as might occur would not take the form of a comprehensive reordering of

¹⁷ Donal McCartney, *W. E. H. Lecky: historian and politician, 1838–1903* (Dublin, 1994); Benedikt Stuchtey, *W. E. H. Lecky (1838–1903)* (Göttingen, 1997).

¹⁸ Robert Ackerman, *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 209.

insular relations although, under the Liberal government there was briefly talk of 'Home Rule All Round'.¹⁹ What took centre-stage, as it had done for decades, was 'the Irish Question'—as it was too simply called. Flirtation with 'Home Rule All-Round' was not a response to a manifest public demand within the 'four nations', or even three of them, but rather a possible way of emasculating the distinctiveness of Irish aspirations for Home Rule. In the event, of course, as we all know, twenty years later, the structure of 1902 was no more. The Great War and the peace settlement that followed transformed the map of Europe. Ireland was partitioned. The Free State went its separate way. Northern Ireland struggled to establish an initially unwanted devolved government in a context of challenged legitimacy. The Free State, too had its enemies and its authority was contested,²⁰ but independent politics developed with a conscious rejection of 'British' hegemony, a determination, so far as possible, to carve out a distinct economic future, to attempt re-Gaelicisation, to forge a new foreign policy and, in general terms therefore, to 'relocate' 'Ireland'.²¹ That is boldly put, and perhaps does not give sufficient space to the elements of 'West British' survival which co-existed alongside the strident assertion of difference and distance—not least being that very Royal Irish Academy which was concerned about its place in 1902.²² There was, in theory at least, no 'mainland' any more as successive administrations and constitutional revision took the Free State steadily away from the British orbit, both insularly and imperially.²³ Here was the liberation of a much-colonised people from their oppression.²⁴

Such a scanty summary scarcely does justice to the political and cultural evolution of the new state—nor does it touch on the historiography which buttressed its existence.²⁵ What is important for our purposes

¹⁹ John Kendle, *Federal Britain* (London, 1997), pp. 58–78.

²⁰ Eunan O'Hallpin, *Defending Ireland: The Irish State and Its Enemies since 1922* (Oxford, 1999).

²¹ M. Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin Party, 1916–23* (Cambridge, 1999).

²² Gillian McIntosh, *The Force of Culture: Unionist Identities in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Cork, 1999); D. G. Boyce and A. O'Day, *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801* (London, 2001).

²³ David Harkness, *The Restless Dominion: The Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921–31* (London, 1969); John O'Brien, 'Ireland's Departure from the British Commonwealth', *Round Table*, 306 (1988), 179–94; Ronan Fanning, 'The Response of the London and Belfast Governments to the Declaration of the Republic of Ireland, 1948–1949', *International Affairs*, 58 (1981–2), 95–114.

²⁴ Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford, 2000).

²⁵ D. George Boyce, 'The Irish historians' role and the place of history in Irish national life', *The Historian*, no. 76 (Winter, 2002), 16–19; Brian Walker, *Past and Present: history, identity and politics in Ireland* (Belfast, 2001).

is that these developments necessarily brought a fundamental change. From a situation in which three countries, all without 'Home Rule' (only the Isle of Man could claim some kind of Celtic autonomy) fringed England in a unitary state, a quite different picture now emerged. If 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales' did have 'Celtic fringe' commonalities, they now had to exist across a state boundary which separated the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the Irish Free State/Republic of Ireland and which now had a land border on the island of Ireland. The polarity of 'Britain' and 'Ireland' now seemed the fundamental division: two islands facing each other. It replaced a polarity of 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales' and 'England'. The creation of Northern Ireland as the only part of the United Kingdom with devolved government symbolised its awkward and anomalous location in this insular reconfiguration. The majority in this gerrymandered entity, as its critics perceived it, asserted British/Irish compatibilities along complex religious and social fault-lines. Such splintered allegiances, the subject of enduring though often baffled investigation to this day, confronted a minority reluctant to give legitimacy by positive participation but alienated by discriminatory exclusion, a minority surprised on occasion by the extent to which its assertion of Irishness seemed, in the South, to have a distinctly 'Ulster' flavour. Contested Irishness had led to partition—the British government being at the time presided over by the only Welsh Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Partition led to sterile separation. Separation exacerbated what outside commentators, at different intervals, mischievously supposed were in fact 'small differences'.

There were important senses after 1922 in which 'Great Britain' solidified. A sense of common Britishness may be thought, in retrospect, to have peaked through the experiences of the Second World War and in the years immediately following. The loyalty of Northern Ireland (and its location in relation to the Atlantic made it particularly useful) contrasted with the neutrality of the South, even though that neutrality can be seen as relatively benevolent to the Allied cause.²⁶ The emergence of the Labour Party placed an emphasis on class solidarity rather than on the national differences within the kingdom.²⁷

²⁶ Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality* (London, 1983).

²⁷ The tensions between class, ideology and nationality are explored, for example, in Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881–1924* (Woodbridge, 1998), and Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds.), *The Labour Party in Wales, 1900–2000* (Cardiff, 2000).

Even so, the supposed ‘solution’ of the Irish Question and the consolidation of the political structure of Great Britain which appeared to follow did not mean the homogenisation of its constituent elements. ‘A nationality that is not based on institutions but on sentimental and historical reminiscences’, wrote the first Lecturer in History at the University of St Andrews, ‘can with difficulty continue to differentiate itself from that of the great nation with which we are united.’²⁸ It might be difficult but it was vital. The belief that the study of history could and should maintain the identity of the nation was the major inspiration which produced the funding to support the Fraser Chair of Scottish History in the University of Edinburgh in 1901. With some difficulty, Glasgow was persuaded to follow suit a decade later. It was necessary to escape from the notion that the task of the historian in Scotland was to fawn before the English constitution. Over the subsequent century that has been done with success, through the study of local history, through the *Scottish Historical Review* and, latterly, deeply informed surveys of Scottish history by such historians as Michael Lynch, Tom Devine and Christopher Smout, all of whom can draw upon a density of monographs which would have been the envy of their early twentieth-century forebears.²⁹ Such forebears would probably have been surprised, some pleasantly so, others not, by the fact that in 2002 Scotland again has a Parliament and a vibrant reassertion of identity. Although it is difficult to be precise about such matters, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that, whatever their precise political sympathies, historians have played a significant part in creating a climate in which such changes have taken place—though of course we must site them within a broad concern on the part of all scholars in the humanities.

The same trajectory, though at a different speed, can also be found in Wales. It is perhaps not surprising that there was no Welsh-domiciled founding fellow of the British Academy in 1902. The University of Wales had only been formed in 1893 and its member institutions were all of recent creation—the contrast with Scotland is striking. It was only at the turn of the century that other national institutions—National Library, National Museum—were established and it took time for their resources to feed through into scholarly publication. The emergence of academic

²⁸ Keith Robbins, ‘History, the Historical Association and the “National Past”’ in *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London, 1993), p. 11.

²⁹ Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991); T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700–2000* (London, 1999); Christopher Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830–1950* (London, 1986).

provision for and development of the study of Welsh history had less of a structural foundation on which to build. It is arguably only into the 1960s that one can speak of a Welsh historiography which has the necessary depth and variety—it was only in 1960 that the *Welsh History Review* was founded, followed by *Llafur* in 1972.³⁰ It is no accident here too that this historiography has played its part in the reshaping of the political culture of Wales which has occurred over the same timespan. Wales now has its National Assembly.³¹

A century after the formation of the British Academy, therefore, the political landscape of ‘The Isles’ has shifted again in a way which few of its founding fellows would have thought likely. For the first time, in considering the modern history of ‘Ireland/Scotland/Wales’, all three non-English territories of the United Kingdom have their own domestic administrations. Northern Ireland, of course, had its own internal government from its creation until 1972. The functioning of its new Assembly, for the moment, remains precarious and problematic.³² There is no uniformity in those devolved structures and perhaps no certainty about their future development. Nevertheless, the very fact of their existence now locates them, potentially at least, in new relationships with each other and perhaps in some senses collectively in relation to England. Nor should the Republic be omitted from these relocations, as linkages are forged, at different levels, both with the United Kingdom government in a relationship which may now be thought to be ‘normal’ and with the various devolved administrations.³³ Indeed, recently, Professor Terence Brown has urged that we should stop using the term ‘these islands’, instead he spoke of ‘our islands’. Such a use implied a recognition of a degree of intimacy not conveyed by the use of ‘these’—such a step might be possible because we can perhaps now retrieve ‘from simplistic patriotic histories complex experiences that reveal long-standing personal, familial

³⁰ It is invidious to name names but some leading figures must be mentioned: R. R. Davies, Glanmor Williams, G. A. Williams, K. O. Morgan, G. H. Jenkins. Dai Smith, *Wales: A Question for History* (Bridgend, 1999), p. 22. See G. H. Jenkins, ‘Clio and Wales: Welsh Remembrancers and Historical Writing 1751–2001’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 2001 (NS, vol. 8, 2002), 119–36.

³¹ See the essays in Ralph Fevre and Andrew Thompson, *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999).

³² This is not the place to provide a commentary on the functioning of the ‘Northern Ireland state’ but there is useful material on its cultural underpinnings in Alvin Jackson, ‘Unionist Myths, 1912–85’, *Past and Present*, no. 136 (Aug., 1992), 164–85.

³³ The Council of the Isles/The British-Irish Council is one such linkage, as yet of uncertain status and prospects. See Graham Walker, ‘The British Irish Council’ in Rick Wilford (ed.), *Aspects of the Belfast Agreement* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 129–41.

and institutional connectedness'.³⁴ In such a process of location and dislocation it is not so much a 'Celtic fringe' which appears but rather a multilateral set of political and cultural configurations which criss-cross 'The Isles'. It is not surprising to find historians seeking to develop programmes of study which parallel such developments.³⁵ This process is paralleled by a level of academic interchange which has reached new heights of activity and achievement. The scale of Irish-Scottish academic interaction—as instanced by the AHRB Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies in Aberdeen—is now considerable.

Multilateral realignments and transformed teleologies

It might be tempting, therefore, in a 'retrospective' to tell a straightforward story which has extended over a century. Ireland (in fragmented fashion), Scotland and Wales have simply achieved political structures which match a confident self-consciousness which is national. There is clearly a sense in which that is true, but it must be placed in a wider context. This change has not come about against the background of a static external environment. Quite the contrary. It is arguable that without such fundamental external change much of the internal change would not have taken place. The British Empire has ended and while it is possible to exaggerate the extent to which its existence provided a common focus and sphere of activity (including, in the years up to 1914, the Irish as both colonised and colonisers), that it did have this effect to some degree cannot be denied. More important, since the 1950s, has been the European dimension, in its successive structures, in its impact on the 'location' of the several parts of 'The Isles'. It has been frequently suggested by, amongst others, the former Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald, that 'Brussels has replaced London as *the* external centre towards which Ireland looks'.³⁶ The multilateralisation of Ireland's external relationships and in

³⁴ Remarks printed in the *Encounter* Round Table *Assessing the Devolution Experience* (Wilton Park, Dec., 2002), p. 17.

³⁵ One such volume is Robert Pope, *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c.1700–2000* (Cardiff, 2001), where it is stated that Scotland and Wales have maintained a strong link through the interaction of their ministers of religion and academics. While there is such a link, one might argue that the link has in fact been far stronger in this respect between Wales and England.

³⁶ Garret Fitzgerald, 'The British and the Irish in the Context of Europe' in Bernard Crick (ed.), *National Identities: The Constitution of the United Kingdom* (Oxford, 1991), p. 14. It is the argument, not altogether convincing, of John Osmond, *Welsh Europeans* (Bridgend, 1995), p. 12, that

this context its 'Europeanisation' has very substantially reduced the Anglo-centrism which was in practice still a feature of the post-revolutionary period. He is of course speaking of the Republic. The 'displacement' of London, on a lesser scale, may be thought to be happening in Scotland and Wales, to an inevitably lesser extent by virtue of the continuance of the union.³⁷ In addition, such has been the scale of economic change across the islands that the old rural/industrial characterisations, once so strongly establishing regional identities in both Britain and Ireland, have substantially lost their significance or are at least having to be 'reinvented'.³⁸ Finally, the Catholic/Protestant polarities which for so long seemed to establish identities within and between the 'Celtic countries', have not altogether lost their potency to divide but they must now exist within a religious and cultural climate very different from that of 1902.³⁹

What must also be stressed, however, is the obvious fact that the substantial and continuing immigration into 'The Isles' (even now into Ireland) from outside them has introduced a multiculturalism of such complexity that it transforms the context in which the historic cultures of the islands have interacted and continue to interact. This impact has been greatest in England and it is perhaps this transformation which now opens a gap between 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales' and England of a kind which could not have been foreseen in 1902. Further, in the complexity of its ethnic composition London has become a 'world city' and further complicates the questions of English identity.⁴⁰ The so-called 'New

while motorways and Severn Bridges had brought London nearer 'in other respects, in terms of cultural affinities and an immediate shared past, it is much further away'. Dublin, Edinburgh, Brussels, Paris, Barcelona and Stuttgart have become 'as near' in cultural terms as London. R. J. W. Evans, *Wales in European Context: Some Historical Reflections* (Aberystwyth, 2001).

³⁷ *Encounter*, jointly established by the British and Irish Governments in 1983, reflected on these matters at its Limerick conference in 2002 published as *Britain and Ireland Now*.

³⁸ M. E. Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922–39* (Syracuse, 1992); S. J. Connolly *et al.*, *Conflict, identity and economic development: Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1939* (Preston, 1999); L. Kennedy, *The Modern Industrialisation of Ireland, 1940–1988* (Dublin, 1989).

³⁹ S. J. Brown and D. W. Miller (eds.), *Piety and Power in Ireland, 1760–1960* (Belfast, 2000); T. M. Devine (ed.), *Scotland's Shame? Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 2000); L. Fuller, *The Undoing of Irish Catholic Culture 1950–1974* (Dublin, 2002); Liam Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion & Nationalism in Ireland* (Belfast, 1996); D. Densil Morgan, *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales 1914–2000* (Cardiff, 1999); Trystan Owain Hughes, *Winds of Change: The Roman Catholic Church and Society in Wales 1916–1962* (Cardiff, 1999); M. Atherton (ed.), *Celts and Christians: New Approaches to the Religious Traditions of Britain and Ireland* (Cardiff, 2002).

⁴⁰ Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002); Robert Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London, 2002); Keith Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London, 1998).

British History' has significantly and successfully overthrown a dominant English/British view of insular history—though there are some who refuse to see the light! However, John Breuilly is surely right to argue that this will not be fruitful if it is merely replaced by a 'four nations/two islands' approach to our history with one national teleology simply being replaced by four.⁴¹ We have to accommodate ourselves to Irish, Scottish and Welsh cultural heritages rather than see a monochrome culture with a simple national label attached. One consequence of the vitality of Irish, Scottish and Welsh historiography is to reveal the richness of regional variation.⁴² The term 'corresponding cultures', which the Welsh scholar Wynn Thomas has used in his study of the interpenetration of the languages of Wales and their literary expression, is applicable throughout 'Ireland/Scotland/Wales'.⁴³ In one of his books, Cairns Craig argues against seeking a 'tradition' of the Scottish novel which would conform to an essentialist notion of what was 'truly Scottish', but sees rather 'a space of debate, a dialogue between the variety of discourses which, in debating with each other, constitute the space that is the imagining of Scotland and Scotland's imagination'.⁴⁴ In Ireland, Scotland and Wales there is a literature which is both English and not in English. Since at least the eighteenth century, writers have been negotiating their way through this duality. Sometimes, indeed, as Robert Crawford has observed of Hume and Burke, they have been Scotticising or Irishing English culture as much as Anglicising Scottish or Irish Culture.⁴⁵

⁴¹ J. Breuilly 'Historians and the Nation', in P. Burke (ed.), *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 85–6. Norman Davies in *The Isles: A History* (London, 1999), is pleasingly iconoclastic in general but does fall into this trap to some extent. Edited by Robert Phillips and Helen Brocklehurst, *History, Identity & the Question of Britain*, is due to appear from Palgrave in 2004.

⁴² Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster* (London, 2000); Máiréad Nic Craith, *Plural Identities, Singular Narratives: The Case of Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 2002); Graham Walker, *Intimate Strangers: Political and Cultural Interaction between Scotland and Ulster in Modern Times* (Edinburgh, 1995).

⁴³ M. Wynn Thomas, *Corresponding Cultures: Studies in the Relations between the Two Literatures of Wales* (Cardiff, 1999). It scarcely needs to be said that what constitutes 'culture' is in all these contexts contested. This author contributed to M. Crozier, ed., *Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1990), pp. 4–18, but the work of the Group which set up a series of conferences has been critiqued in Alan Finlayson, 'The Problem of "Culture" in Northern Ireland: A Critique of the Cultural Traditions Group', *The Irish Review*, no. 20 (Winter/Spring, 1997).

⁴⁴ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 33; David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick and Pat Straw, *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change* (Edinburgh, 1989); Emyr Humphreys, however, in *The Taliesin Tradition* (Bridgend, 2000), p. 4, sees 'the spirit of Taliesin' as the tutelary spirit of the place which is Wales.

⁴⁵ Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Edinburgh, 2000).

So, we may conclude that it is the very uncertainty about place—what language or languages to put on signs or maps—which paradoxically defines the places we currently call Ireland, Scotland or Wales. ‘Correspondence’ and the ‘dialogue’ is the only way to continue. This lecture has been the work of a historian but it is manifest that in this field historians must be in dialogue not only with the many branches of their own discipline which are pertinent but also ‘correspond’ with social anthropologists, linguists, literary and cultural critics whose insights are of special relevance. This lecture, even though it makes no pretence to be fully comprehensive, nevertheless demonstrates the very significant academic developments which have occurred over the century since 1902. Even so, in the context of insular reconfiguration and European enlargement, the ‘correspondences’ must be both deeper and wider in contemplating the study of Ireland, Scotland and Wales (and England) into the next century of the Academy’s existence. In the future, as that reconfiguration proceeds, with all its uncertainties and instabilities, there is a clear need to promote an ever more multilateral approach to the complex interrelationships of these islands: *our* islands.