

Dr Jerry Hunter
Welsh Department
University of Wales, Bangor

Email: jerry@pioden.net

Summary:

Language, Religion and Print Culture in the Welsh Diaspora

This research network is exploring the formation of identity in the Welsh diaspora, focusing on the intersecting of language, print culture and religion in communities in North and South America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Taking a comparative approach to the study of bilingual communities, the Welsh-English experiences of North America are examined against the Welsh-Spanish experiences of South America. The project seeks to identify ways in which immigrants and their descendants have employed a variety of linguistic, cultural and religious resources as part of the process of constructing and negotiating identity in the diaspora.

Located at the University of Wales, Bangor, the founding members of the network include Jerry Hunter (Welsh), D. Densil Morgan (Theology and Religious Studies), and Margaret Deuchar (Linguistics). The network's administration is located in the Welsh Institute for Social and Cultural Affairs (University of Wales, Bangor), under the direction of Duncan Tanner.

Research Themes and Questions

Existing terminology from the field of linguistics (specifically relating to the study of 'code-switching' in bilingual contexts) will be interrogated from the perspective of literary and cultural studies. It is hoped that this process of inquiry will provide insights into the ways in which print culture and its attendant literature negotiates the construction of identity within bilingual contexts.

The specific historical experiences of North and South American communities will allow for an examination of the intersection (and, at times, collision) of religious beliefs and political practices within the context of the diaspora's linguistic and culturally based processes of identity construction. Specific topics will include, for example, nineteenth-century Welsh Americans who played a part in the struggle between abolition and slavery and Welsh Patagonians during the Falklands/Malvinas War.

Aims, Objectives and Operation of the Network

The network is bringing the expertise and insight of scholars from different fields to bear upon the study of the Welsh diaspora in North and South America. In addition to drawing upon the multiple fields of linguistics, history,

theology, literature, and the social sciences, scholars with expertise in fields such as the German and Irish-language cultures of the United States will help to temper the comparative study of Welsh-English and Welsh-Spanish linguistic and cultural interactions.

The network's operation is driven by four two-day sessions. These are small round-table conferences in which formal or semi-formal presentations are combined with group discussion. In addition to these four sessions, participants are encouraged to engage in ancillary discussion (e.g., via e-mail).

As some of the network's scholars are (or were) not familiar with the empirical fields in question, experts in the history and culture of the Welsh diaspora provide analyses and assessments of primary source material which is then used as the basis for more theoretical explorations. Network participants coming to Welsh from other fields then provide perspectives on this material. It is hoped that this will generate a network-wide discussion with two main aims. The first is to consider the construction of Welsh-American and Welsh-Patagonian identity from the critical and theoretical points of view provided by a number of disciplines, and the second aim is to use this specific interdisciplinary study of the Welsh diaspora to generate a new critical framework for studying the intersecting roles of language, religion and print culture in constructing identity in general.