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Benedict Anderson's conceptualisation of nations as 'invented communities' identified the emergence of modern nationalism through a combination of demotic print culture and the growth of capitalism. He argued that the spread of popular literacy was a pre-condition to imagining membership of the nation in a democratic age in which the printed word acquired increasing practical and symbolic significance.(1) By contrast, the impact of the digitization of that print culture in the cultivation of modern senses of belonging has yet to be properly studied.(2) Nevertheless, one remarkable example of how a national institution has set out its stall in the digital age in an unmistakably ambitious way, is the impressive digital mission (and here, for once, that managerially-tainted word seems appropriate) of the National Library of Wales to ensure that its contents are made available to a public who might never darken the doors of its imposing building at Aberystwyth.(3) While this review focuses on the library's Papurau Newydd Cymru Arlein / Wales Newspapers Online (WNO) resource, that project must be situated in the context of the library's wider plans for digital archiving, dissemination and engagement.

The National Library of Wales describes itself auspiciously as the repository of 'the memory of the nation', and it has developed a digital strategy to make increasing amounts of its printed, manuscript and visual resources freely available in digital form. The library, therefore, has been at the forefront of making accessible to citizens an important part of their own print heritage. In addition, it has developed a programme for capturing and archiving material from the internet relating to Wales.(4) Whereas the model adopted by the major public providers of digital resources in England (such as the British Library and the National Archives) is based on payment for using a publicly-funded resource, to date public institutions in Wales have steered a different course, that is closer to the French, Australian and New Zealand models of open access.(5) This is reinforced by the recent availability of a wide range of freely available digital resources (including newspapers) relating to Wales and the First World War.(6) WNO is part-funded by the Strategic Capital Investment Fund and the European Regional Development Fund through the Welsh Government, thus providing a clear example of how political devolution, in co-operation with the EU, has led to tangible cultural and scholarly benefits.

An earlier and smaller version of WNO was officially launched in March 2013. However, the site has developed enormously since then. Following the addition of a new tranche of titles in July 2015 and a re-vamp of the Beta website, the database currently includes freely-accessible content from 120 different newspaper titles, comprising 15 million articles and 1.1 million pages of text covering the period 1804–1919. A useful bar chart on the site's main page demonstrates the distribution of the digitized material by decade. 37 of the titles are Welsh-language publications, while the remainder are in English (though some publications feature content in both languages, thus blurring a neat linguistic distinction). The resource is a reminder that print culture in modern Britain has not been monolingual.

Hitherto, the main resource for digitized Welsh newspapers in the 19th century was 19th Century British Library Newspapers, provided by Gale Cengage Learning. This includes six Welsh titles, five of which relate to north Wales, thus providing a geographically distorted picture of both the development of the newspaper press and of social, cultural, economic and political developments in the country. Simply by making available a much larger body of newspapers, covering all parts of the country in two languages, WNO represents a major step-change in the volume of digital text available and a great opportunity for historical research. Titles ranging from the Abergavenny Mail and Farmers' Voice to Llais Llafur (Labour Voice), from the Cardiff Times to the Flintshire Observer, Tarian y Gweithiwr (The Worker's Shield) to the Barry Dock News, and the South Wales Daily Post to Potter's Electric News are now searchable online. The site provides basic information about each newspaper title, including its publisher and years of publication, and in some cases there is information about editors and political/religious standpoints. Most of the titles relate to the period before 1910, although a number of newspapers covering the years 1914–19 have been

added from another project on Wales and the First World War. Several of the titles included were produced in Liverpool, London and the United States, emphasising the role of émigrés in 19th-century print culture, and there is much content in these titles relating to Welsh communities overseas in the Americas, Australia and elsewhere.

So how easy is the website to use? The layout of the site is broadly intuitive and easy to navigate. There are several ways in which it is possible to search for information. One way to search the source is to click on the title of a newspaper and then a specific issue, which can be read page by page much as the hard copy would be. Also, it is possible to undertake a simple word search of the entire database or to limit that search by title and period and it is possible to search within certain specified categories of information (news, adverts, family notices and 'detailed lists'). Once the results appear, it is possible to filter them in a variety of ways, including the degree of relevance to the search word, by date, newspaper title, article category, region and decade. After clicking on a specific item the reader is presented with a digitized image of the article as well as an OCR text that can be copied and pasted into a document. It is easy to move from the specific article being read to the page on which it appears, thus ensuring that an article can be contextualised in the issue in which it was published. Since July 2015 one valuable additional feature on the main page of the site is a browse function for images in the newspapers, divided according to cartoons, graphs, illustrations, maps and photographs.

One significant limitation of the resource is that it contains digitized newspaper files held by the National Library of Wales alone. In some cases this means that a significant proportion of the issues published are not available through this website. Two examples will suffice: Swansea's *Cambrian*, the first Welsh newspaper, which began publication in 1804, has a substantial gap in coverage on this site spanning the years 1847–69, while the Independent Labour Party's *Merthyr Pioneer*, which was established by Keir Hardie, covers the years 1914–9 but does not yet include issues for the pre-war years. In the latter case, the library possesses copies for the pre-1914 years but they have not yet been made available in digital format. This means that the website can provide a way into the use of some of these publications but it cannot take the place of consulting some of the hard copies (or microfilms) at the National Library or other repositories, at least at present. At a time when some local authorities are taking the axe to library and archive services as a way of balancing their budgets (thus imperilling access to, or even the existence of, local repositories), this is potentially a serious deficiency for the user, albeit one that is hardly the fault of the National Library. It is to be hoped that further funding can be secured in future to digitize those newspaper issues that aren't in the library's holdings. In the meantime, certain sorts of electronic searching will yield more useful results for some newspaper titles, and for some years, than for others.

Users of the website need to be aware of several other lesser difficulties. Perhaps the most important of these is the fact that some searches result in a few sources coming up more than once, so that it is not possible to simply read off the number of hits for a particular word or phrase. Duplication of some searches in the results prevents a simple counting of hits.

Secondly, the OCR text of articles for some searches provides a more or less accurate rendition of the digitized text, depending on the state of the original and the extent to which the print has retained clarity over the years. Some of the text versions of results (but not the scanned image) appear in garbled form that requires a considerable amount of cross-checking after downloading.

The implications of the availability of resources such as this for a generation of students and new researchers who will be familiar only with the digital form of these publications have yet to be fully explored, although preliminary discussions of the 'digital turn' for historical research have identified some of the potential for research as well as the difficulties.⁽⁷⁾ In the meantime, it is possible to identify some of the challenges that face historians who now have at their disposal very large volumes of text to mine. Perhaps the most important challenge

relates to methodology, and historians who use newspapers extensively in their research will need to develop more sophisticated methods for searching, collating and analysing serial textual data than those currently in general use. Furthermore, creating linkages between databases that have been created in isolation from one another would now seem to be a priority in creating holistic approaches to the study of the past. 'Digital Wales', like 'digital London' (8), is now far closer to realisation at least as far as the 19th and early 20th centuries are concerned.

The WNO project has an Open Data policy, stating: 'The Library is committed to sharing the data behind the Welsh Newspapers Online website. Access to the APIs that the website is built on will be available soon'. The 'digital Victorianist' Bob Nicholson has written: 'This is to be commended in the strongest possible terms. It's hard to predict what new tools we'll build to explore the WNO, but its commitment to openness is an invitation to our imaginations; a chance to start thinking about how we might explore press archives in innovative new ways'.⁽⁹⁾ It is this openness to new methodologies that makes his resource a potential game-changer for research. Achieving the full potential of the WNO will entail the acquisition of skills from disciplines such as corpus linguistics so that unknown associations and concordances in journalism can be discovered.

In the meantime, this resource cannot yet claim to be a full newspaper 'memory of the nation', but it is a hugely important open access resource and one from which historians of Wales, Britain and further afield can derive a great deal of benefit in their research. It has made it possible to address familiar questions in quicker and more efficient ways than was possible previously and it enables historians (and members of the public) to pose novel questions using research techniques that could not be used before. This is already a formidable resource with enormous potential for the study of the 19th and early 20th centuries and has the potential to be a game-changer in researching the histories of modern Wales.

Notes

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991). On the Welsh press, see: Aled Gruffydd Jones, *Press, Politics and Society: a History of Journalism in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993).
2. However, see Samuel M. Wilson and Leighton C. Peterson, 'The anthropology of online communities', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31 (2002), 449–67; David J. Elkins, 'Globalization, telecommunication, and virtual ethnic communities', *International Political Science Review*, 18, 2 (1997), 139–52.
3. For a statement of this, see: Andrew Green, 'Digital library, open library: developments in the National Library of Wales', *Alexandria*, 14, 3 (2002), 161–70.
4. <http://www.llgc.org.uk/collections/conservation/webarchivewales/> [accessed 12 March 2014].
5. On the different embodiments of national identity in libraries, see: Charlotte Priddle, 'National identity and the digital library: a study of the British Library and the Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru [National Library of Wales]', *Libri*, 54 (2004), 158–68.
6. See <<http://cymru1914.org/en/home>> [accessed 12 March 2014].
7. Joanna Guldi, 'The history of walking and the digital turn: stride and lounge in London, 1808–51', *Journal of Modern History*, 84, 1 (2012), 116–44.
8. Robert B. Shoemaker, 'Digital London: creating a searchable web of interlinked sources on eighteenth-century London', *Program: Electronic Library and Information Systems*, 39, 4 (October 2005), 297–311.
9. <http://www.digitalvictorianist.com/2013/03/welsh-newspapers-online/> [accessed 12 March 2014].