
To be a Welsh woman, it seems, was to be doubly doomed to obscurity. Not only were women a less-public sector of society, but there was "Welshness" to contend with. It has been a case of Bibliographic Ethnic Discrimination. Too often entries have read: "Women, Welsh, See Women, English." And this occurs in spite of the fact that Welsh, being Celts, are a distinct group with their own language and culture, though they have long been subject to English rule.

It is time, according to Constance Wall Holt, a Welsh-American librarian, to retrieve the obscure Welsh woman from the vast tapestry of information. The result is a lovingly rendered volume of bright strands from the fabric of Welsh and Welsh American life. It is the first comprehensive bibliography on Welsh women.

The mountain of references that Holt discovered after years of work and travel are skillfully organized with many index-pathways to the information. Each entry is numbered and is found in appropriate chapters by subject. The reader may browse through chapters headed: Art; Medical Sciences; Feminism; Education; Law; Music; History and others. The "AUTHOR INDEX" and "TITLE INDEX" refer to appropriate entries.

Materials referenced include everything from books to videos, diaries to doctoral dissertations, speeches to pamphlets. Selectively represented are newspapers (which are often unindexed) and genealogies (which are often in the Welsh language).

Most useful is the "SUBJECT INDEX" through which the reader may access a specific person, place or subject. This is interesting browsing, and the unexpected turns up from time-to-time. The obscure Welsh origins of the novelist George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) are noted. And there is Gwen John (1876-1939), the lesser-known painter sister of Augustus John; she is represented by numerous entries.

Welsh American pioneer women are documented with "a sense of the trials endured by these Welsh immigrants." Contributions by a myriad of Welsh and Welsh American women are noted. There is the microbiologist, Alice Catherine Evans, who discovered the cause of undulant fever. There is Martha Carey Thomas, second president of Bryn Mawr College, who documented sex discrimination in education.

However, I searched the subject index in vain for mention of Hywel Oda, the Welsh Ruler (d. 950), whose published laws were
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known to provide remarkably humane rights for women of the time. Perhaps this material is included in other discussions of law or history, but this good king should, at least, rate a reference.

It should be said, in reference to the subtitle of Holt’s book, that one might expect the mention of “American” to include Canada (for which there are two entries in the subject index). However, in the "Introduction," Holt makes it clear that she covers women in the United States and Wales. There is no apparent reference to Patagonia, the Welsh settlement area in Argentina, either.

About the "Subject Index": there are relatively few Welsh surnames, so the myriad of Mary Jones, for example, are distinguished, in the index, by dates, place names, or other differentiations. This is a small matter, admittedly, but it shows Holt to be culturally aware of the Welsh way.

Holt, herself, admits that she does not read the Welsh language, so many more mountains of information remain to be mined. The history of Welsh literature and culture predates that of the English, and this Welsh-language culture continues strongly in the present. Holt does include one chapter of Welsh language sources, but she hopes that “perhaps a bibliographer fluent in Welsh will be motivated to document further sources in the Welsh language now that an English-language bibliography is available.”

In order that the referenced sources be more easily accessed, a "Library Location Index" is included. One notices that many sources are located in Wales: at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. However, there are sizeable holdings in the U.S., as well: in Minneapolis, Madison and other university and historical society collections. Holt deserves special praise for having deposited copies of the more-difficult-to-obtain materials at the Balch Institute which issues “A Guide to Manuscript and Microfilm collections” (with a list of holdings by ethnic group). Holt’s material, and that of other ethnic scholars, is not hidden under a bushel to be locked away and forgotten.

The "Periodical Index" is particularly useful. Though there are eighteen entries for the British Medical Journal, for example, others of the serials are somewhat specialized and obscure. Most of the Welsh American periodicals have not been indexed, so much information still remains locked up on microfilm.

Holt’s bibliography should be a “must have” item for Women’s Studies programs, Ethnic Studies programs, and libraries. Welsh women have been brought out of the shadows, and their lives will shine for us.

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