The revolt which engulfed Wales in the years after 1400 was assuredly the revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr. While other local leaders are occasionally mentioned and the rebellion was known as ‘the revolt of the Welsh’, contemporaries, and not least the English government, were not in doubt that this was Owain’s revolt. He was its leader and it was his claim that gave it legitimacy. Thus, when the men of Flintshire decided to ‘become rebels’ in August 1403 they were ‘sworn to Owain Glyn Dŵr’, and when the tenants of Dyfnwyn Clwyd defected to the rebels they became ‘the men of Owain’. Theirs was a revolt built around a cause; but the cause was built in turn around a leader.

Epilogue

R. R. Davies

At the end of the day it was not the revolt itself, nor the myriad episodes of which it was composed, nor the local leaders and the guerrilla armies which sustained it for so long, which survived in popular recollection and in historiographical tradition. Rather was it the figure of Owain Glyn Dŵr himself. He established for himself both in popular consciousness and in written histories a role that no other Welshman could emulate; and he seems to have done so at a remarkably early date. Owain Glyn Dŵr was both a historic and a mythic figure. He was a man of the recent and recoverable past who had yet secured early membership of the
pantheon of timeless heroes. He was, and has remained, exclusively and proprietorially Welsh. He had created an image for himself and his cause which allowed him to be converted, in the fullness of time, into a national hero.

Friends and Foes
R. R. Davies

in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr

The revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr began as the conspiracy and vision of a group, or possibly two groups, of men in north Wales in the autumn of 1400; by the midsummer of 1403 it had become a movement which took the whole of Wales for its stage and drew its support from all comers of the country. The success of the revolt, first in surviving beyond its first, very uncertain, year and then in transforming itself into what may be truly termed a national revolt, owed not a little to the incompetence and distractions of the royal government and of the English lords in Wales as well as to the difficulties of countering guerrilla warfare in mountainous terrain. The evidence is much too sparse and one-dimensional to show why some men chose, or at least agreed, to fight for Glyn Dŵr while others, at equal cost to themselves and their families, chose otherwise. But two things are fairly sure. First, in Wales as in other societies which experience revolt, choice for the majority was only made reluctantly and when it could no longer be avoided. Secondly, the success of the revolt was such that sooner or later it demanded a response; it could not be ignored.

The Programme National Salvation
R. R. Davies

in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr

Owain Glyn Dŵr's appeal as leader of a Welsh rebellion did not rest initially on a fully worked-out programme or manifesto. Rather, it seems in its early days, to have drawn its strength from three sources. The first was a profound sense of anti-Englishness, directed in particular at the
privileges of the boroughs in Wales, the exploitation of the anachronistic ethno-legal distinction between English and Welsh, and the sense of exclusion, alienation, and belittlement felt by a conquered people. The second was the conviction of many Welshmen that the rulership of Wales belonged of right to a prince of their own race and that Owain Glyn Dŵr's credentials for that position were, or could be shown to be, outstanding. Thirdly, both of these sentiments were deeply grounded in a mythology and prophecy whose potency was recurrently renewed and whose applicability to the present was capable of endless adaptation. It was only as the revolt blossomed, particularly in the years 1403–6, that Glyn Dŵr and his advisers could afford to raise their sights from these almost visceral sentiments to a more sustained vision of where the revolt might lead. That vision drew heavily on a corpus of lore and prophecy interpreted with a surprising literalness; but it also picked up the concepts, analogies, institutions, and practices of contemporary kingship and the Church and used them to try to create the vision and indeed, in some small respects, the practices of an independent principality of Wales.

Allies

R. R. Davies

in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr

Owain Glyn Dŵr had not, in the end, been well served by his allies. One by one they had either failed or deserted him. The recurrent failures are a comment on the immense problems of communication and co-ordination, of effective timing, which confronted any medieval alliance; the will for joint activity was often present but the means to make it work in practice was not. Nor could there be any doubt that the Welsh were used as junior, and expendable, partners by their allies: had the Percies dislodged Henry IV in 1403 or 1405 they would almost certainly have reneged on any promises they had made to Glyn Dŵr; as to the French, the solemn promise of July 1404 that the Welsh would be invited to join any peace they made with the English counted for nothing when domestic and international considerations dictated the need for an Anglo-French truce in December 1407. Yet brittle as were all the alliances, formal and informal, Glyn Dŵr had no option but to conclude them; they were the best prospect for the long-term success of his movement.
Submission and Aftermath
R. R. Davies
in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr

The long-drawn-out demise of the Glyn Dŵr revolt should not occasion great surprise. Though the revolt had begun with a formal defiant act at Glyndyfrdwy in September 1400 followed by an even more public foray across north-east Wales, the rebellion was in most parts of Wales a guerrilla campaign, marked by the withdrawal of obedience and the collapse of royal and seignorial control, and punctuated by very occasional raids. In other words, the revolt was often less the replacement of one structure of authority by another, nor even necessarily the pledging of support to the rebel cause, more the effective collapse of the existing pattern and mechanisms of authority. Wales had slipped out of its old pattern of obedience. By the same token, the return to obedience was often a hesitant and gradual process.

Revolt in Wales 1400–1409
R. R. Davies
in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr

Owain Glyn Dŵr was proclaimed prince of Wales at his own manor of Glyndyfrdwy on 16 September 1400. The very nature of the proclamation made it clear that this was a premeditated act based on long-festering grievances and an attachment to an ideology of an independent Wales governed by its own native, legitimate ruler. It is clear that the movement of 1400 was carefully planned and co-ordinated among the disaffected leaders of Welsh society in north Wales. For five days, 18–23 September, Owain's supporters attacked English towns in north-east Wales: Ruthin, Denbigh, Rhuddlan, Flint, Holt, Oswestry, and Welshpool. Equally striking, though frequently overlooked, was the outbreak of rebellion in north-west Wales, including in Anglesey, at much the same time. The whole of north Wales was to some degree involved in the rising. But by early 1409 Owain Glyn Dŵr, was no more than a desperate and hunted guerrilla leader. Wales was no longer a society in revolt.
Owain Glyn Dŵr is arguably the most famous figure in the history of Wales. His revolt (1400–09) was the last major Welsh rebellion against English rule. It established a measure of unity such as Wales had never previously experienced and generated a remarkable vision of Wales as an independent country with its own native prince, its own church and its own universities. In the event, Owain's rebellion was defeated or, perhaps more correctly, burnt itself out. But Owain himself was not captured; and soon after his death he became a legendary hero among the Welsh people. In more recent times he has come to be regarded as the father of Welsh nationalism.

Guerrillas and Garrisons

Glyn Dŵr's revolt was primarily a guerrilla war; but during the years of success he and his fellow leaders were able to muster much larger forces. Reports regarding contemporary figures, often based on hysterical reports, need of course to be taken with a very large pinch of salt; but they do register clearly that by 1403, and at the height of the military season, Owain was able to command very substantial forces. There are at least two reasons which help explain why the English authorities took so long to quell the revolt. One arose out of the structure of governmental authority in Wales. The other explanation for the inadequacy of the English government's response to the Welsh revolt was not peculiar to Wales but rather was a general feature which bedevilled Henry IV's rule, especially in the first half of his reign — a desperate shortage of cash.
Peoples and Power

R. R. Davies

in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr

Wales in Owain Glyn Dŵr's day was a small and sparsely populated country; its total population, after the ravages of successive outbreaks of plague, is unlikely to have exceeded a quarter of a million, and it may have been even less. Yet, for all its smallness, Wales harboured a varied and complex society. If we are to understand the nature of the revolt which overwhelmed the country after 1400 and also the measure of resistance it met, we must make try to understand that society in all its complexity. Contemporary social and legal classifications may help us to do so. Two in particular stand out. The first was the almost universal distinction in medieval society between the free and the unfree. A second fundamental legal classification that was particular to Wales was that between the English and the Welsh. It was a distinction which, to a greater or lesser degree, prevailed throughout much of Wales.

Tensions and Aspirations

R. R. Davies

in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr

Revolts are born of, and feed upon, unresolved tensions and unfulfilled aspirations within society. This was so in Wales in 1400. The rebellion of Owain Glyn Dŵr owed a great deal to the personal vision and grievances of Owain himself, while the unexpected success that attended it is likewise, no doubt, explained to a large degree by the preoccupations, and incompetence, of the English government. Yet the wide degree of support that the revolt came to enjoy and the programme that its leaders eventually came to espouse can ultimately only be explained in terms of the tensions and aspirations within Welsh society itself. It is no easy matter of course, to penetrate the tensions and aspirations of any medieval society; in Wales the difficulties are compounded by the fact that, with the exception of native poetry and some individual and communal petitions, the surviving historical evidence is overwhelmingly that of the English kings, lords, and governors of Wales. Even this...
During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, following Edward I’s final conquest, the inhabitants of the whole of Wales were adjusting to the fact that they were a cosmopolitan people of diverse origins. Their communities were interleaved, in varying measure, with migrants from England and Ireland, France and the Low Countries, and from elsewhere in Wales, and this process was unlikely to be reversed. In particular, contacts between English and Welsh multiplied, and relationships between them deepened. The revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr in the first decade of the fifteenth century, the most serious of the challenges that faced the unsteady Lancastrian king, Henry IV, threatened for a time to disrupt this process. The gradual defeat of Glyn Dŵr’s supporters and allies in the decade after 1406 posed large and pressing questions: how to ensure security for the English kingdom in the west thenceforward; how to restore peace and stability to the commonwealth; and how to achieve reconciliation among the peoples of Wales and with the king's subjects in England. This chapter examines the aftermath of Glyn Dŵr's revolt, particularly the relationship between English and Welsh in the borderland.

Hindsight is the besetting sin of the historian. Nowhere is it, perhaps, more pernicious in its impact than when discussing a war or a revolt. Chaos is turned into order at the stroke of the historian's pen; isolated and unrelated episodes are arranged into neat causal patterns; lines of
development and crucial turning-points are perceived with a clarity and confidence denied to contemporaries. The revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr is no exception. Therefore, it behoves us to try to reconstruct as best we can the way contemporaries responded to the revolt and likewise to re-create what the experience of the revolt meant for them.

The Age of Conquest
R. R. Davies
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This book examines the period when Wales struggled to retain its independence and identity in the face of the Anglo-Norman conquest and subsequent English rule. It explores the nature of power and conflict within native Welsh society as well as the transformation of Wales under the English crown. An account of the last major revolt under Owain Glyn Dŵr forms the culmination of this work.

Introduction
R. R. Davies
in The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr
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This chapter presents a brief overview of the revolt led by Owain Glyn Dŵr. The revolt struck Wales like a bolt from the blue in September 1400; indeed some Englishmen came to wonder whether the king was not taking it altogether too seriously. The movement which spread, albeit briefly, through much of north Wales within weeks and which was followed a few months later by the equally sudden and even more spectacular capture of Conway Castle was clearly rather more than the personal aberration of a disaffected Welsh squire and his close companions; it quickly tapped an undercurrent of frustration, resentment, and aspiration in Welsh society. It soon became a truly national revolt.
Wales in Owain Glyn Dŵr's day was, to most outsiders, a largely unknown, inaccessible, and uninviting country. The character of its terrain — notably its ‘horrid and frightful’ mountains, rocks, and precipices — was one of the major reasons for its reputation, and remained so for centuries. Roads were poor and inadequate. At the very borders of Wales — whether in the forests of Ewloe in the north-east, the steep-sided valley of the Wye north of Chepstow in the south-east, or the daunting tracts of moorland and mountain that fell on the traveller's eye at Leominster or Shrewsbury — the prospect for the traveller seemed to be grim indeed. But the greatest deterrent of all to the traveller was the image which had been created in his mind of the Welsh themselves — hardy and brave certainly, even generous, hospitable, and devout; but also totally unreliable, ‘wild’, backward, and, in the words of a contemporary English abbot, ‘fierce and fickle’.