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EARLY MODERN WALES, *c.*1525–1640

J. GWYNFOR JONES

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For Eryl, Gareth and Eleri

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PREFACE

This study examines current thinking on some significant developments in Welsh society in the period between the Tudor settlement of Wales, 1536–43, and the Civil Wars. It also offers a personal view of these developments. I have taken the year 1525 as a starting date because it was in that year that the Council in the Marches was revived. It was from then on also that events occurred which led to anxious views being increasingly expressed concerning the condition of law and order in the Principality and the Marches and, in due course, to various measures being taken by the government to settle the political problems of those regions. The so-called Acts of Union (1536–43) are convenient pegs on which to hang virtually all developments and trends in Wales for the remainder of the period covered in this volume. In this context the Tudor settlement and its consequences can, in some respects, be deceptively easy to interpret. However, attitudes and forces existed that make such a historically conventional approach questionable. This study raises certain issues concerning the character of the governing classes and the society in which they lived: their stability and, at times, their insecurity, their power, their susceptibilities and weaknesses, their public spirit and their private enterprise. It would be misleading to adopt a narrow view of individuals and families who had prospered and had allegedly abandoned the restrictive pattern of communal life

for more rewarding experiences elsewhere in the centres of power – whether they were in the countryside or, more usually, in the urban areas. Those who were drawn to participate in government, who enhanced their landed power, who were socially mobile and who dabbled in legal, political and cultural matters were deeply influenced by a diversity of forces, both native and alien, thus revealing complexities that require unravelling by the political and economic historian, and the sociologist as well as the literary expert.

Use has been made of original sources (adapted into modern English) chiefly to highlight the way contemporaries gave expression to their opinions and feelings in an often challenging and perplexing age. I am indebted to Mr Brian Ll. James, formerly Keeper of the Salisbury Library at University of Wales College of Cardiff, and Dr Medwin Hughes of the Department of Welsh at the same college, for reading the work and making suggestions from which I have benefited greatly. However, I alone am responsible for the material and interpretations contained therein. Thanks are also due to the staffs of various libraries, especially at the University of Wales College of Cardiff and the South Glamorgan County Library at Cardiff as well as at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. Dr Jeremy Black has given expert guidance and I wish to thank him, Ms Vanessa Graham, my publishing editor, and Mr Keith Povey, Editorial Services Consultant, for their courtesy and assistance at all times. I also wish to record my debt of gratitude to Dr Trevor Herbert of the Open University in Wales who, as Director of the Welsh History and its Sources Project, permitted me to use two maps drawn by Mr Guy Lewis of University College, Swansea. It is appropriate that I acknowledge the work of several historians of the Welsh Tudor and early Stuart periods who, over the last fifty years, have contributed significantly to our understanding of this formative century in the history of Wales. Lastly, I would like to thank my wife for her encouragement and forbearance – not once over the last two years did

Preface

she complain that this project kept me in the study for far longer than I had anticipated.

J. GWYNFOR JONES

GLOSSARY

- arddel* A once laudable custom that was illegally used by marcher lords to employ criminals and outlaws in their private armies.
- bonheddig* The qualities and virtues of gentility that were featured in the mode of behaviour adopted by the sixteenth-century gentry.
- brëyr* A chieftain or nobleman, representing the highest ranking freeman in the medieval Welsh native clan community.
- commote* A subdivision of the *cantref* (hundred) and the most convenient unit used for administrative and jurisdictional purposes.
- cyfran* The division of clanlands between all sons according to the medieval Welsh laws of inheritance.
- cymortha* A means of dispensing communal aid in rural communities that was illegally exploited by marcher lords who used it as a means to impose forced exactions on tenants.
- eisteddfod* An assembly of professional bards to formulate and modify rules of the poetic craft maintained by the traditional bardic schools.

Glossary

<i>gafael</i>	A holding of heritable land forming part of the <i>gwely</i> (see below) under the native clan system varying in size and dispersed in scattered parcels.
<i>gwely</i>	Clanland held in joint-ownership by coparceners or joint-occupiers claiming descent from a common ancestor who was the first permanent settler on the land.
<i>plasty</i>	The hall or mansion of a noble or gentle family regarded as the focal point of regional leadership.
<i>priodawr</i>	The individual free clansman characterised by his descent from a common ancestor, military prowess and eventually his landed proprietorship.
<i>uchelwr</i>	A person of high birth claiming free clan status and the forerunner of the sixteenth-century Welsh squire-gentleman.

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