ABSTRACT
For centuries, continental Europeans have come to Wales for numerous reasons. During the Romantic period some came seeking a rural idyll, whilst others in the Victorian era travelled as industrial spies, and during times of war many refugees escaped to Wales to find shelter from persecution. Not only have continental Europeans left their traces among the people of Wales settling here but they have also written extensively about their experiences in diaries, letters, books and magazines or novels. This project report showcases some of the recent findings from the AHRC-funded project ‘European Travellers to Wales, 1750–2010’ jointly undertaken by Bangor University, the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies at Aberystwyth, and Swansea University.

For centuries, continental Europeans have come to Wales for numerous reasons. During the Romantic period some arrived seeking a rural idyll, whilst others in the Victorian era travelled as industrial spies, and during times of war many refugees escaped to Wales to find shelter from persecution. Not only have continental Europeans left their traces among the people of Wales by way of immigration, but they have also written extensively about their travel experience in diaries, letters, books and magazines or, more recently, in blogs on the internet. Remarks on the nature of travelling in a foreign country, its people, the weather, town and country life, industrial enterprise, social endeavours or encounters with unfamiliar food are only a few of the topics found in these texts.

Commencing in June 2013, the three-year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project European Travellers to Wales looks into the various portrayals of Wales and ‘Welshness’ in European travel writing in the period 1750–2010. Building on the existing scholarship surrounding English travel writing about Wales, the project undertakes to broaden the scope by investigating a wide range of accounts, such as travelogues, essays, diaries or letters written by continental Europeans. Guidebooks, visitors’ books, fictional writing and the visual arts complement this vast array of source materials.

The project involves close collaboration between Principal Investigator Carol Tully (Bangor University) and co-investigators Heather Williams (University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies) and Kathryn Jones (Swansea University) as well as Research Officer Rita Singer (Bangor University). Two PhD-studentships, held by Anna-Lou Dijkstra (Swansea University) and Christina Les (Bangor University), compliment the research team. To date, European Travellers to Wales has produced a number of articles and a guest-edited special issue of Studies in Travel Writing that is focused on travel writing about Wales from within the archipelago as well as further afield. In addition, each of the team members have shared initial findings from the ongoing research in academic papers and keynote lectures at a number of international conferences and public talks for various local history groups.

In cooperation with three museums (Ceredigion Museum, Aberystwyth; Swansea Museum; Gwynedd Museum, Bangor), a travelling exhibition with the title EuroVisions: Wales through the Eyes of European Visitors, 1750–2015 is on tour across Wales until July 2016. It is accompanied by a bilingual online
exhibition that displays digital copies of the artwork and objects on tour, including texts produced for all the interpretation panels. The exhibition has received enthusiastic responses from the public and academics alike during its first station in Aberystwyth in summer 2015 and was featured in an online editorial for BBC News and the television programme Heno on S4C. A large proportion of the artwork displayed in EuroVisions was created by refugees to Wales, such as Josef Herman, Heinz Koppel and Martin Bloch, who remain a lasting influence on Welsh artists.

Finally, with support by the educational officer of Ceredigion Museum, the project has produced bilingual worksheets based on the national school curriculum in Wales to accompany the travelling exhibition. Based on these worksheets and the text panels from the exhibition, educational resources for use in classrooms have been created in cooperation with the education officers of the National Library of Wales. The material is freely available for download via the project’s virtual exhibition website as well as through Hwb, the educational online repository of the Welsh Government.

The team is working towards the publication of a co-authored monograph as part of the research output for this project. Recurring themes come into view already in travellers’ descriptions of Wales dating back to the 1750s. As the majority of visitors from eighteenth and nineteenth-century France cover a broad range of themes, it is difficult to categorise many of their accounts. There are few attempts among the writers from France to impose rigid thematic boundaries on their narratives. Thus, detailed discussions of industrial architecture, production and heavy pollution frequently blend with descriptions of eisteddfodau, i.e. Welsh cultural festivals.

Generally, the loosely themed accounts by travellers from France reflect the historical development of tourism in Wales. Visitors often talk about how many other tourists they encountered during their journey, and they also give practical tips on visiting various tourist attractions, such as ruined castles and churches, sites of industry, seaside resorts or modern bridges. Among the group of early travellers, Armand-Louis-Bon Maudet, Comte de Penhouët (1764–1839) from Brittany went on an extended pedestrian tour through south Wales, which shows considerable overlap with the well-known tours previously undertaken by William Gilpin (1724–1804) in 1770 and Henry Penruddocke Wyndham (1736–1819) in 1777. Penhouët’s Letters Describing a Tour through Part of South Wales (1797) contains descriptions of early-established tourist attractions such as Tintern Abbey, the then newly built bridge in Pontypridd, the custom of whitewashing cottages together with one of the earliest known images of a woman wearing what in the nineteenth century became established as the Welsh national dress.

Similar to the majority of other travellers whose accounts describe tours through either north or south Wales, Penhouët confined his journey to one region. Of those few visitors who travelled the whole country, many fail to say much about how they covered the distance in between or what they saw along the way. Subsequently, there is a curious lack of descriptions of mid-Wales. This gap is particularly noteworthy as previous studies of English travel writing have identified Thomas Johnes’s Hafod Uchtryd estate, about 30 km to the east of seaside Aberystwyth, as one of the birth places of tourism in Wales. This absence of continental visitors to the estate is remarkable given that Johnes had connections with mainland Europe and he owned the busy Hafod Arms Hotel beside the Devil’s Bridge waterfalls, which were an early popular tourist magnet situated on the then main road through mid-Wales. As with the French descriptions, many of the accounts by travellers writing in German between 1750 and 1900 share a tendency to address a broad range of themes. Despite a frequent conflation of Wales and England,
visitors from the German states, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland generally show an interest in the particularities of Welsh customs and traditions, eisteddfodau or history.

Not only were travel routes determined by visitors seeking Welsh culture, but industrial espionage also played its part. Consequently, innovations in architecture and industry greatly affected the itineraries. Specific sites of interest to German visitors included the world’s largest iron works located in Merthyr Tydfil in south Wales and Thomas Telford’s suspension bridges across the River Conwy and the Menai Strait in the north. Written during his years of exile in Britain in the 1850s, Johann Heinrich Bettziech’s (1813–1876) descriptions of hellfire furnaces illuminating the Welsh valleys at night reflect German enthusiasm for the sublime spectacle of industrial production. As Telford’s bridges combine monumental neo-classicist architecture with an unprecedented lightness of steel chains and beams, the German travel accounts praise them as tokens of modernity and enterprise to which the countries of mainland Europe should aspire.

Although the project has identified considerably fewer accounts written by women during the nineteenth century, they appear to share the enthusiasm of their male compatriots for sites of industry. Malwida von Meysenbug’s (1816–1903) mention of a leisurely visit to Penrhyn Quarry near Bangor in the company of her Anglesey hosts shows that this site of industry had become an established tourist attraction for domestic and foreign travellers.

As is the case with the French travellers during the same period, mid-Wales remains comparatively undervisited and under-described among German visitors precisely for its lack of major sites of industry. However, for those who travelled between north and south, such as the physician Carl Carus (1789–1869) accompanying King Friedrich August II of Saxony (1797–1854) on his journey in 1844, Aberystwyth formed an important stop owing to its emerging significance as a seaside resort.

One of the key aspects of the European Travellers to Wales project is the deliberately broad treatment of what constitutes travel literature. Indeed, a significant portion of the texts under consideration do not contain descriptions of leisurely travel or travelling as a character-building, educational activity. Instead, these accounts are the result of industrial espionage (Reinhold Rücker Angerstein from Sweden inspects iron works and coal mines in the 1750s), trade (Jean-Baptiste-Léonard Durand describes his experience of suffering ship wreck near Laugharne on his return from Senegal in 1786) or academic work (geographers Harry Waldbaur and Hans Praesent apply new methods of surveying land in 1911).

Similarly, seeking refuge, military imprisonment and immigration have factored for continental Europeans as reasons for travelling to Wales for centuries; however, it was only during the twentieth century that the experience of involuntary travel and displacement was vocalised among the identified records of travel. A number of accounts detail refugee experiences during the two World Wars, such as Richard Duprieux sketching his own and other compatriots’ impressions of Wales since escaping the German invasion of Belgium in 1914. Children’s perspectives are perhaps among the most important addition to the collection of continental impressions of Wales in the twentieth century. Especially, the large-scale rescue efforts surrounding Basque children during the Spanish Civil War in 1937 and later of Jewish children from Germany in the Kindertransport of 1939 contribute valuable descriptions of a culturally invisible Wales. The majority of the children were unaware of its existence or distinction from England prior to their arrival or even during their stay. They grappled with the combined trauma of losing their families overnight as strangers bundled them off to unknown destinations, learning a new language over a short time and even having their identity changed by their new adoptive parents. The harrowing
Kindertransport accounts by Susi Bechhöfer, adopted by a Baptist minister and his wife from Swansea, and Ellen Davies, who was sent to Swansea to live with an elderly Jewish couple originally from Imperial Russia, illustrate how children endeavoured to make sense of their Welsh surroundings based on their own limited world knowledge whilst being forced to take on a new name or even a new religion.\textsuperscript{13}

Summaries and detailed information about the above-mentioned accounts by European travellers from outside the archipelago since the eighteenth century are freely available in the project’s online database Accounts of Travel, together with information on more than 350 other identified travel records.\textsuperscript{14} At the point when this report went into press, the database is a work in progress; the research team continuously adds new content whilst refining and updating older entries as new material becomes available. Where possible, the individual entries give information about the authors’ dates of travel, countries of origin, purpose of travel and gender, summary notes on the content of the account, languages in which individual accounts are available and the type of account.

The database allows for browsing the contents in alphabetical order of each traveller’s surname simply by following the links. To obtain more specific results, the database can be searched according to various parameters and it is furthermore possible to combine queries to narrow down the search results even further. Moreover, interactive maps present the places that have been visited by each traveller based on the textual evidence in each of the accounts. Each of the maps has been compiled with the help of a Google Maps plugin, which placed some constraints on the presentation of the locations. For example, place names, landmarks and specific locations are listed predominantly by their English name in current use. Consequently, variant spellings of the same location over the previous 300 years have been silently corrected to their current form, such as the contemporary spelling of Caernarfon where in previous centuries travellers have interchangeably used Carnarvon, Caernarvon, Caer-narfon and other variants. In those cases where travellers have documented their visit of larger geographical features, such as rivers or valleys, without indicating a precise location, the information is presented in the category ‘Additional Sites and Landmarks’ together with those places which proved ‘un-mappable’ because they are not recorded by Google Maps or they have since been destroyed or have disappeared.

In order to complement these accounts, the project also investigates other forms of writing that are related to travelling in Wales, such as messages in visitors’ books, guidebooks and fiction by continental Europeans. Visitors’ books not only trace developments in modern tourism, but they also reveal changes in the socio-cultural and language attitudes of travellers from all walks of life over prolonged periods of time. Serving as an easily accessible interface between the experience of travel and site-specific forms of semi-formal writing, messages by travellers from continental Europe in Welsh visitors’ books constitute microforms of travel literature. Despite their brevity, entries in visitors’ books are a highly complex form of travel writing particularly with respect to the inscribers’ self-fashioning of identity for future readers. Writerly choices are not only directly rooted in the discourse of travel, but also in socio-political circumstances in the individual travellers’ countries of origin and their travel destinations in Wales.\textsuperscript{15}

Guidebooks represent another interface between the travel experience and the representation of the visited site in (frequently illustrated) written form. Comparative analysis of the German, French and Dutch DK Eyewitness Travel Guides to Great Britain has
uncovered how choices in translation directly affect Wales’s image for tourists from mainland Europe. Despite the goal of presenting readers with fact-based, objective descriptions of available services and tourist sites, translation choices result from assumptions about levels of awareness of Wales and Welsh culture in the tourists’ respective countries of origin. Subsequently, the German, French and Dutch DK Eyewitness Travel Guides perpetuate Welsh stereotypes at various degrees, such as the inheritance of Celticity, Arthurian romance or the impoverished post-industrial valleys in the south and sublime, emptied landscapes towards the north-west.16

While the persistence of such images is regrettable in factual writing, authors of fiction engage with stereotypes in a creative and meaningful way. In twentieth-century novels and short stories from the European mainland, the theme of wild landscapes is central to the portrayal of the protagonists and their progress throughout the story. Narrating the Welsh landscape as an extension of the (Celtic) past into the present allows authors such as Antal Szerb (Hungary), Jörg Bernig (Germany) or Gerbrand Bakker (Netherlands) to externalise their protagonists’ inner conflicts with regards to their sense of selfhood, agency and (un-)belonging.17

Over the course of its first two years, the research project European Travellers to Wales, 1750–2010 has identified an unanticipated number of accounts by continental Europeans resulting from their journeys through Wales. Their great variety and thematic richness are testament to the longstanding cultural, creative and intellectual exchange between mainland Europe and a frequently marginalised region of the Atlantic Archipelago. While a significant amount of the corpus reflects the inheritance of stereotypes about Wales as pre-modern, impoverished hinterland, other accounts challenge these perceptions thoroughly. They afford Wales a much more central and particularly active position, namely in relation to engineering and industrial enterprise, its literary tradition and language identity.

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Amélie [Choiseul] de Suffren, Voyage pittoresque dans le midi et le nord du pays de Galles, ou suite de 48 vues désinées sur les lieux (Paris: Gille, 1805); Adolphe Thiébault, ‘Voyage à pied dans le nord du pays de Galles’, Books 14.1–2, Thiébault Family mss., 1733–1872, bulk 1793–1872, Lilly Library, Indiana University Bloomington, Bloomington. The waterfalls have been sketched by a number of visitors; among them are French travellers Amélie Choiseul de Suffren (1765–1817) who toured south and mid-Wales in 1802 and by her compatriot Adolphe Thiébault (1797–1875) who travelled around north Wales in 1827.

Johann Heinrich Bettziech], ‘Besuch in einer englischen Kohlen- und Eisenstadt’, Die Gartenlaube, 1 October, 1855, 531.

Malwida von Meysenbug, Memoiren einer Idealistin. 3 vol. (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1900), II–50. On at least two occasions, Malwida von Meysenbug stayed on Anglesey with her friends, the Middleton-based industrialist Salis Schwabe and his wife Julia Schwabe, both originally immigrants from the German states. As it transpires from Meysenbug’s autobiography, the Schwabes were well-connected among the art circles in Britain and not only counted Elizabeth Gaskell among their friends, but also had numerous friends from continental Europe visit them on their Welsh estate, such as the Czech painter Jaroslav Čermák (1831–1878).


Jeremy Jeremy and Susi Bechhöfer, Rosa’s Child: The True Story of One Woman’s Quest for a Lost Mother and a Vanished Past (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996); Ellen Davies, Kerry’s Children: A Jewish Childhood in Nazi Germany and Growing up in South Wales (Bridgend: Seren, 2004). For more on this subject of children refugees in Wales, see: Carol Tully, ‘Out of Europe: Travel and Exile in Mid-Twentieth-Century Wales’, in Travel Writing and Wales, eds. Kathryn

14Rita Singer et al., eds. *Accounts of Travel*, Bangor University. http://etw.bangor.ac.uk/about-database.


17Christina Les, 'European Travellers to Wales in Twentieth-Century Fiction' (working PhD diss., School of Modern Languages, Bangor University).