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The Coming of the Celts, AD 1862: Celtic Nationalism in Ireland and Wales

Caoimhín De Barra

Publication Date

30-03-2018

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Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

De Barra, C. (2018). *The Coming of the Celts, AD 1862: Celtic Nationalism in Ireland and Wales* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. https://doi.org/10.7274/24857286.v1

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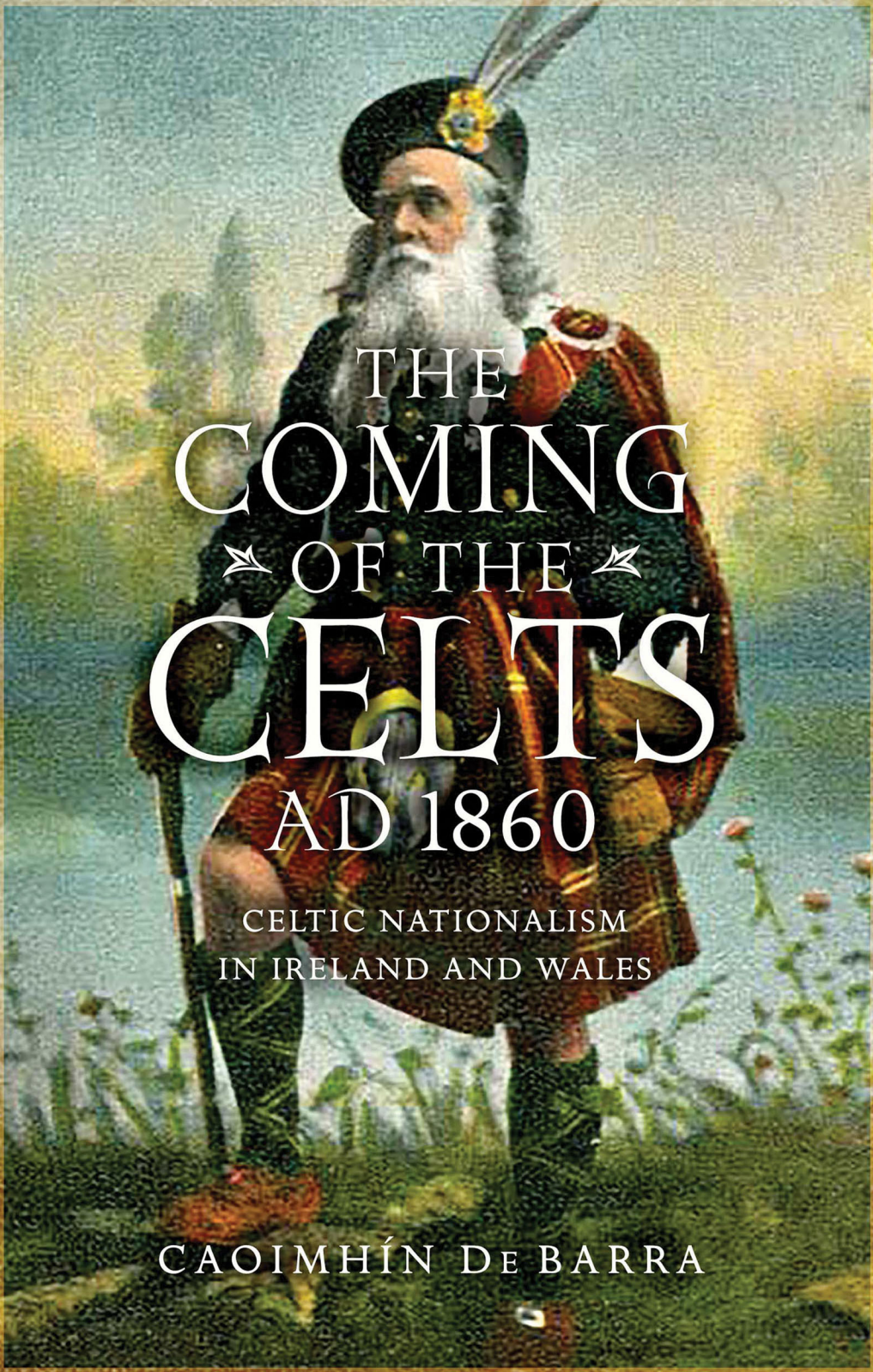

THE COMING OF THE CELTS AD 1860

CELTIC NATIONALISM IN IRELAND AND WALES

CAOIMHÍN DE BARRA

The Coming of the Celts, AD 1860

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Celtic Nationalism in Ireland and Wales

Caoimhín De Barra

University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana

University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556
undpress.nd.edu

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Published in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: De Barra, Caoimhín, 1984– author.
Title: The coming of the Celts, AD 1860 :
Celtic nationalism in Ireland and Wales / Caoimhín De Barra.
Other titles: Celtic nationalism in Ireland and Wales
Description: Notre Dame, Indiana : University of Notre Dame Press, [2018] |
Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2017055845 (print) | LCCN 2018007086 (ebook) |
ISBN 9780268103392 (pdf) | ISBN 9780268103408 (epub) |
ISBN 9780268103378 (hardcover : alk. paper) |
ISBN 0268103372 (hardcover : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Celts—Politics and government. | Celts—Ethnic identity. |
Nationalism—Ireland. | Nationalism—Wales. | Civilization, Celtic.
Classification: LCC DA42 (ebook) | LCC DA42.D47 2018 (print) |
DDC 320.540941509/034—dc23

∞ *This paper meets the requirements of*
ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

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Le Kathy agus Aisling, mo mhná maoiní

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the process of researching and writing this book, I have relied on the assistance of many wonderful people in a variety of different ways. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge those people here.

This project began as part of my doctoral research while I was studying at the University of Delaware. My adviser, John Montaño, was instrumental in first helping me secure a place in the program at UD and then helping me craft and write my dissertation. Two other faculty members at UD, Owen White and Jim Brophy, very kindly agreed to serve on my doctoral committee, and through their rigorous critiques this book took shape. Paul O'Leary of Aberystwyth University also gave very generously of his time in serving as an outside reader on my committee. All four have continued to offer advice and mentorship since I completed my doctoral studies, and I owe them all a deep debt of gratitude.

Attempting to write a book about the history of Ireland and Wales while living in the United States means that undertaking research can be a daunting financial proposition, especially for a junior scholar. I am very grateful to both the History Department and the Office of Graduate and Professional Development at UD for providing me with fellowships that enabled me to travel, research, and write during my final two years of graduate school. I also wish to acknowledge the generosity of Dean Bob Ready and Assistant Dean Bill Rogers of the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies at Drew University. As my employers, they provided the funds to allow me to spend several weeks in Wales in the summer of 2015, engaging in research that was essential for the completion of this book.

In order to access relevant material in the National Library of Ireland, I was required to spend weeks and months at a time in Dublin in recent

years, and I was very lucky to have several friends who were willing to host me in their homes. Pat Crowley and Lisa Halpin found a space for me in their apartment in January 2011. Ken O'Conner and Nadine Rödel allowed me to stay with them for most of the summer in 2011. More recently the O'Rorke family, Ciarán, Marian, Shane, Barry, and Oisín, have very kindly made a bedroom available to me on several occasions, and unfortunately their generosity has been rewarded only by my inclination to keep showing up at their doorstep. I would like to thank Shane O'Rorke in particular, as he has also been willing to go to the National Library to check files on my behalf. To all of my friends who have helped me out over the years, thank you very much.

I would like to thank the staff of both the National Library of Ireland in Dublin and the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. The employees of both institutions were always very helpful, considerate, and patient in dealing with my extensive file requests over several weeks at a time.

Two of the chapters that appear in this book are based on material I have already published. The chapter "Protestants Playing Pagans" is an expanded version of a chapter that appeared in *Authority and Wisdom in the New Ireland,* edited by Billy Gray and Carmen Zamorana Llena. The book was published by Peter Lang Ltd., who have very kindly given me permission to republish that material. The chapter "A Celtic Paradise" is largely based on my article "A Gallant Little Tírín: The Welsh Influence on Irish Nationalism, 1870–1918." This material was published in *Irish Historical Studies,* no. 153 (May 2014), and editor Robert Armstrong has kindly given me permission to publish it once more.

I would like to thank my editor, Eli Bortz of the University of Notre Dame Press, for all of his assistance in bringing this book to term. As someone who has never engaged in this process before, I was very unsure at times how to go about it, but Eli was incredibly helpful and supportive from the beginning, and his suggestions and recommendations have greatly improved this book.

My father, Kevin, must also be thanked. Not only did he instill within me a love and passion for history from an early age, but he also played an invaluable role in helping me with the many administrative tasks that arose over the course of putting this book together.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Kathy. She has always been my strongest supporter in my academic endeavors. Kathy has had to make many sacrifices to help make this book a reality, including being press-ganged into the role of research assistant from time to time, taking vacations in locations conveniently near archives, and having to spend several weeks alone at home carrying our first child while I traveled overseas for research. For all that and more, I thank her from the bottom of my heart.

INTRODUCTION

On April 24, 1916, Patrick Pearse entered the General Post Office in Dublin and read a proclamation announcing Ireland's independence from British rule as the first step of a plan to forge an Irish republic through armed rebellion. Part of Pearse's justification for this bold action came from his belief that the Irish nation, as an expression of Irish culture, was in decline. A distinct Irish identity could be preserved only through the establishment of an independent government that would foster and cherish the Irish language. Pearse had spent much of his adult life championing the cause of the native language of Ireland. Although he was not an Irish speaker from birth, Pearse developed a passion for the language from spending time with his Irish-speaking relatives. He had joined the Gaelic League as a teenager, and he quickly became one of its most active members. Pearse received a BA in modern languages, including Irish, from the Royal University of Ireland before becoming editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the Gaelic League newspaper, in 1903. He wrote stories and poetry in the Irish language, and in 1908 he established St. Enda's, a bilingual school in which students were encouraged to develop a deep love of the Irish language and culture. Pearse's perception of Irish identity, therefore, was inextricably bound up with the Irish language, and his belief that it needed to be saved ultimately led him to take up arms against Britain.

On December 7, 1916, David Lloyd George became the prime minister of Britain at a time of monumental importance, with the country embroiled in war against Germany. Among many other things, Lloyd George is remembered as the only British prime minister whose first language was not English. Lloyd George was born in Manchester but raised in a Welsh-speaking household. Having trained as a solicitor, he became active in politics and was elected to Parliament as the representative of Caernarfon in 1890. He became quite interested in Welsh issues and helped coordinate an unsuccessful effort to organize a Welsh home rule party in the 1890s. Despite this failure, Lloyd George retained his distinct Welsh identity throughout his career, regularly addressing political rallies across the Principality in the Welsh language. Welsh was also the language of his home when he lived in Downing Street during his premiership. But for Lloyd George, nothing about his identity as a Welsh man or Welsh speaker precluded his involvement in British politics. As a member of the Liberal Party, he championed causes for the benefit of Britain as a whole, not just Wales. In short, he saw no contradiction in taking pride in both his Welshness and his Britishness.

The year 1916, then, was important in both Irish and Welsh history.[1] On one level, it is possible to interpret the events of this year as evidence of significant differences between the two nations. Certainly nationalists in both countries celebrated their national distinctiveness from England, based on their separate culture and language, but this had resulted in very different political expressions of nationhood. Pearse, a man who had learned Irish, believed that Ireland could be a nation only through rebellion and independence, while Lloyd George, the native Welsh speaker, was the embodiment of how Welsh identity was accommodated within a wider sense of Britishness. But comparing the careers of Pearse and Lloyd George also reveals the connections between Ireland and Wales. Pearse had spent time in Wales, examining how the Welsh language had been introduced as a school subject in English-speaking schools in Cardiff. He was impressed by what he found, and wrote in *An Claidheamh Soluis* that the approach to teaching Welsh in Welsh schools could and should be adopted in relation to the teaching of Irish in Ireland. Lloyd George, for his part, had come to political prominence in Wales through his promotion of Welsh home rule in the 1890s. Although Lloyd George himself was always somewhat hesitant

to link the cause of Welsh home rule to that of Ireland, it is undeniable that the push for Welsh self-government was heavily influenced by the success of the Irish Parliamentary Party in winning political concessions for Ireland. Furthermore, both Lloyd George and Pearse identified themselves, and their respective nations, as Celtic. Indeed, Pearse had taken part in the first Pan-Celtic conference in Cardiff in 1899, and he tried to encourage the Gaelic League to take a more active part in the Pan-Celtic movement. Lloyd George was not as interested in fostering connections between the respective Celtic countries, but he did deliver a speech at the Pan-Celtic congress held in Caernarfon in 1904. Pearse and Lloyd George then, were Celts, and Wales and Ireland were Celtic countries, but as 1916 had demonstrated, Celtic nationalism meant different things on the two sides of the Irish Sea.

The relationship between Ireland and Wales stretches back into the mists of time, before entities known as "Ireland" or "Wales" even existed. Anyone who studies the two languages that are indigenous to these countries is struck by their similarities, despite the fact that speakers of both are mutually unintelligible to each other. Linguists disagree as to when Irish and Welsh became different languages and whether this separation occurred before or after the languages traveled from Europe to Britain and Ireland. Regardless, the linguistic relationship suggests that the roots of the Irish and Welsh nations can be traced back to a common point of origin in the remote past. Prionsias Mac Cana has observed that the major factor "in shaping the historical relations between Ireland and Wales is the geographical one, the fact that they face each other across the Irish Sea . . . and by now it is something of a cliché to say that in ancient times the sea served to join lands rather than to separate them."[2] In early modern Wales, there was a tradition that the original inhabitants of that nation were Irish speakers, who were driven out of the territory by invading Welshmen.[3] While few scholars support this viewpoint today, it is widely acknowledged that Irish settlements had developed in Wales by the fifth century CE. This is demonstrated by the presence of approximately forty stones inscribed with ogham, an early Irish alphabet, across parts of Wales. The stones are mostly found clustered in two areas, namely in Pembrokeshire in the southwest, where the ancient kingdom of Dyfed stood, and in Gwynedd, in the northwest of Wales. That Irish settlers should arrive in these particular areas is not surprising, as these are the parts of Wales that are physically closest to Ireland.

Little is known about the nature of these settlements or what became of them, although Iwan Wmffre has suggested that the Dyfed region may have been home to Irish-speaking aristocrats ruling over a Welsh-speaking population from the fourth to the sixth century.[4] The Welsh poet Thomas Gwynn Jones reported that even in the twentieth century there were old people living in Carmarthenshire who counted sheep up to twenty in Irish.[5] Jones appeared to be implying that this was the legacy of Irish settlement in the area dating back to the fifth century, but this seems highly unlikely.

There is also a great deal of evidence for ecclesiastical exchanges across the Irish Sea prior to the arrival of the Vikings. The legend of St. Patrick is the most famous example of a Christian missionary traveling from one country to another, although there is no certainty that Patrick lived in, and was kidnapped from, the area known as Wales today. The most obvious influence of British Christians traveling to Ireland was the orthography adopted for the Irish language, based on the Latin alphabet that the missionaries brought with them and how they pronounced it.[6] According to the hagiographies of various Irish and Welsh saints, several of them crossed the Irish Sea to further their religious education, and "Irish and Welsh monks and clerics lived and worked side by side in the same communities." St. Finnian of Clonard studied at the monastery of Saint David in modern Pembrokeshire, and St. Cadoc of Wales sailed to Ireland to study under St. Mochuda at Lismore.[7] Scholars who have compared the annals of medieval Ireland and Wales see evidence of "an interesting intellectual commerce" taking place between monastic centers in Ireland and Wales.[8] The interest among Welsh and Irish clerics regarding their counterparts appears to have continued up until the eleventh century.

Traveling across the Irish Sea was not limited to clerics, however. Records from the early medieval period show that Irish and Welsh princes and military leaders often fled across the water when political circumstances at home took a turn for the worse. For example, Fogartach ua Cearnaigh was a king of Brega who, when his forces were defeated in 714, fled to Britain for two years then returned to claim the high kingship of Ireland. Rhodri the Great, king of Gwynedd, was forced to flee to Ireland in 877 following a defeat at the hands of marauding Danes. The Irish annals also record the presence of Welsh mercenaries at several battles fought in Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries, demonstrating that political ties did

exist between Welsh and Irish kingdoms.[9] The arrival of Viking raiders and settlers changed the political, social, and economic dynamic around the Irish Sea. The establishment of Dublin by Norsemen as well as the development of Viking settlements in Gwynedd joined parts of Ireland and Wales in what Colmán Etchingham has called an "Insular Viking zone."[10] The evidence suggests the Norse rulers of Dublin considered parts of northern Wales to be within their suzerainty, and this is likely the reason that, having captured Dublin himself, Brian Bómhara (Boru) was recorded as "high king of the Gaels of Ireland, and the foreigners [*Norse*] and the Welsh" at the time of his death in 1014. Similarly, one scribe referred to Díarmait mac Máil-na-mBó, king of Leinster up until his death in 1072, as "king of the Welsh and the Hebrides and Dublin and the southern half of Ireland."[11]

Perhaps the most famous example of the existence of political and military ties between medieval Welsh and Irish kingdoms comes from the biography of Gruffydd ap Cynan. Gruffydd was the grandson of Iago ap Idawl Foel, who had been king of Gwynedd before his assassination in 1039. Iago's young son, Cynan, fled to Ireland, eventually marrying Ragnhildr, daughter of the king of Dublin, who gave birth to Gruffydd. As a result, Gruffydd was raised in Ireland among the Hiberno-Norse, and it is reasonable to assume he adopted many Irish customs and spoke the Irish language. Beginning in 1075, Gruffydd made several efforts to capture the throne of Gwynedd, using Irish and Norse mercenaries to help him in his bid. Three times Gruffydd was defeated and forced to return to Ireland before he was able to consolidate his rule of Gwynedd, beginning in 1099.[12] According to legend, Gruffydd was so impressed by the high quality of Irish poetry and music that he insisted that these standards be replicated in Wales. Gruffydd supposedly called for Irish bards to travel to Wales and meet their Welsh equivalents in the year 1100. Gruffydd insisted that the Welsh bards adopt the regulations used by Irish poets and musicians in composing their work. Mac Cana has observed that the medieval Welsh and Irish poetic orders "are indeed remarkably similar in their repertoire and professional structures" but maintains that "there is as yet no clear and convincing evidence that the Irish poetic system exerted any substantive influence on that of Wales, through the agency of Gruffudd ap Cynan."[13]

The Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169 marked a significant turning point in the historic relationship between Ireland and Wales. Many

of the Norman knights who came to Ireland had previously won lands in Wales, married there, and brought their experience of fighting the Welsh to bear in conflict with the Irish. Indeed, they brought Welsh mercenaries with them to Ireland, as well as tenants to people their new estates from their territories in Wales, many of whom would have been Welsh natives.[14] In one sense, the Norman invasion created new networks across the Irish Sea, with marcher lords holding estates in both countries, using profits from one to improve the other, fleeing political trouble in one part of their domain by escaping to the other, and bringing Irish armies to Wales and vice versa. However, many of the old links between Ireland and Wales were severed after 1169. As Seán Duffy notes, "Because the east coast of Ireland was the area most densely colonized, it formed a wedge securely driven between native Wales and Ireland."[15] Where once defeated Irish and Welsh leaders had crossed the Irish Sea for respite, now this option was no longer on the table, as the likely authors of their declining fortunes, vassals of the English state, exerted considerable power in both countries. Furthermore, church reform in Ireland in the wake of the Norman Conquest appears to have changed the relationship between Irish and Welsh clerics, and the free intercourse that once had existed between them seemingly ceased. Mac Cana writes that one could "argue that the beginning of this final period before the disintegration of the old social order—1200–1600 in very broad terms—marks out the practical separation of Ireland and Wales as nations sharing the same comprehensive cultural heritage."[16]

Nevertheless, the cultural memory of these Irish and Welsh interactions lived long after 1169. The name Walsh or Welsh is the fourth most common surname in Ireland, and this reflects the extensive Welsh influence in the Norman invasion.[17] Cecile O'Rahilly has noted that the name *Breathnach* (Briton, or Welshman) referred not just to native Welsh speakers but also to Norman and Flemish settlers who came to Ireland via Wales. Furthermore, several towns across Ireland contain *brannagh* or *brennock* in their names, essentially anglicizations of *Breathnach*.[18] The Welsh language, for its part, also reveals the intertwined history of Ireland and Wales. The Welsh word for an Irishman is *Gwyddel*, which comes from *gwŷdd*, meaning "wild, barbaric, uncultivated." Mac Cana observes that one could compile a rich thesaurus from Welsh literature of casual and unflattering references to the Irish, such as "an Irish trick," "an Irishman of a problem," "farting like an

Irishman," and the word *Gwyddel* generally being a term of abuse.[19] Despite such familiarity between the two populations, Irish and Welsh interactions after the Norman invasion appear sparse when compared to the centuries preceding it. In the sixteenth century, thousands of Irish men and women seeking to escape the constant warfare that plagued their native land settled in Pembrokeshire. This caused some concern among local officials, who sent letters to London asking that the situation be remedied.[20] Welsh troops participated in the suppression of the 1798 rebellion, when Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn led a cavalry regiment raised in Wales and known as the "Ancient British Fencibles." The Great Famine in Ireland brought a surge of refugees to Wales. Those who crossed the Irish Sea found little sympathy among the Welsh population, suspicious of the immigrants because of their poverty, their perceived lack of hygiene, and, most importantly, their Catholicism.[21]

However, the large-scale migration of the Irish to Wales heralded a period of renewed interactions across the Irish Sea. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were an era in which intellectuals, writers, and politicians in Ireland and Wales were greatly interested in each other's affairs. The central argument of this book is that between approximately 1860 and 1925 the people of Ireland and Wales became more sympathetic toward each other than ever before or since, leading to an exchange of ideas across the Irish Sea that reshaped the political and social landscape in both countries. A number of factors explain why Irish and Welsh affairs became more relevant to the respective populations of the two nations. First, the middle of the nineteenth century marked the point at which the people of Ireland and Wales, as well as Scotland, Brittany, the Isle of Man, and Cornwall, came to regard themselves as ethnically and racially "Celtic." Although the use of *Celtic* implied an ancient lineage and shared heritage, its adoption by the Irish and Welsh populations was quite modern and had itself been created by a combination of linguistic and archaeological studies, the advent of modern science, the rise of ethnic nationalism, and the development of mass literacy. In short, Irish and Welsh peoples did not identify each other as "Celtic cousins" in 1800, but by 1860 they did. Meanwhile, changing circumstances in Ireland and Wales pushed nationalists in both countries to study their fellow Celts for ideas on how to improve the affairs of their own people. The dramatic decline of the Irish language in the late nineteenth

century, at a time when the number of Welsh speakers was growing, naturally led those interested in saving Irish to look to Wales for lessons on how to preserve a Celtic tongue in the face of increasing Anglicization. Meanwhile the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Ireland in 1869 was of enormous interest to the largely Nonconformist population of Wales, which resented the supremacy given to the Anglican faith in their country. Up until the middle of the nineteenth century, Wales had largely been considered a culturally distinct part of England, as opposed to a separate political unit within the United Kingdom. But Welsh observers noticed that the Irish population gained disestablishment, land reform, and increasing government attention and funding, all through the efforts of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Inspired by the Irish example, Welsh nationalists for the first time insisted that Wales was a distinct political entity, entitled to separate legislation to address its unique needs. Amid this growing rapprochement between Ireland and Wales, several attempts were made to promote more formal ties through the Pan-Celtic movement, but a sense of "Celticness" was never able to trump national allegiances among the masses, or at times even among those dedicated to Pan-Celticism. This heightened awareness among Irish and Welsh nationalists regarding each other lasted up until around 1925, when the Irish War of Independence and Irish separation from the United Kingdom meant that the experiences of the Irish and the Welsh were no longer as relevant to each other. Ultimately, I argue that although nationalists in each nation regularly used the other as an example of what they wanted their own country to be, Celtic identity usually operated as a superficial mask to be taken up or laid down depending on convenience and circumstances.

Of course, in a discussion of Celtic nationality within Britain and Ireland, one would expect Scotland to figure prominently, but I have decided to largely exclude Scotland from this study for a number of reasons. First, a number of works have already explored the relationship between nationalism in Ireland and Scotland,[22] and Welsh and Scottish forms of nationalism during the twentieth century have also been compared,[23] but there is little literature probing the connection between Ireland and Wales. Second, to a degree different from both Ireland and Wales, the notion of Scotland as a "Celtic" nation was more contested, owing to the fact that many people living outside the Scottish Highlands rejected their alleged "Celtic" ancestry

and instead saw themselves as descended from Anglo-Saxon stock. Scottish nationality also differed from that of Wales or Ireland in that it was based in part on Scotland's history as a state, whereas Irish and Welsh nationalists focused on their cultural differences from England to accentuate their own identity. For the most part the Scottish middle class could (and did) see themselves as partners (albeit junior ones) within the British Empire, whereas many Irish and Welsh subjects did not always believe they were full participants within the imperial project.

There are a couple of other reasons why I decided to focus exclusively on Ireland and Wales. In terms of their "Celtic" background, the connection between Ireland and Wales is more tenuous than either country's connection to Scotland. Irish nationalists viewed the Scottish Highlands as an overflow of Gaelic Ireland and acknowledged the linguistic and cultural bond between the two countries. Welsh nationalists believed that a similar bond existed between themselves and the Bretons in France, owing to the similarity of their languages. Meanwhile, the fact that Wales and Scotland were identified as peripheral regions on the same island helped form a sense of common cause between them. It is precisely because the supposed bond of common Celtic identity was weakest between Ireland and Wales that I believe their relationship merits further study. Scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson have commented on how communities are created through "invention" or "imagination." It seemed to me that the relationship between Ireland and Wales would be flexible; a bond of Celtic brotherhood could be imagined when suitable, but the differences between the countries could also be stressed when necessary. Therefore, in terms of exploring how nationalist (or pan-nationalist) communities were created in the public imagination, I believe that the connection between Ireland and Wales is a particularly fertile area for research.

A number of scholars have highlighted how nationalists construct a national identity by emphasizing the nation's distinctness from the national "other"—a country that is shown to embody different values and characteristics from those of the people who are members of their own nation.[24] For both Welsh and Irish nationalists, England filled this role. In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd writes that England served as a political and psychological double for Ireland, a foil against which Irish identity could be created.[25] Similarly Gwyn A. Williams, in his essay "When Was Wales," argues

that Wales cannot be defined without England.[26] Without disputing the fact that national identity in Ireland and Wales was partially formed through juxtaposition with England, it seems inevitable that Irish and Welsh nationalists would also have made comparisons with their fellow Celts. After all, the Irish and Welsh lived in the same state and shared linguistic ties and (supposedly) a biological and historical connection. I argue that, for Irish and Welsh nationalists, their brethren across the Irish Sea served as something of a mirror in helping them form their own identity. Through comparison, nationalists in both countries could measure the achievements of their own nation and draw inspiration from their Celtic cousins while at the same time stressing their distinctness as individual nations.

I would like to say a quick word about some of the terminology used in this book. I employ the word *Celticness* throughout; this is to be understood as a broad term referring to anything that could be defined as Celtic. It does not imply a narrow or rigid ideology because, as will be demonstrated, many people had multiple, at times contradictory, ideas regarding what made a person, item, or region "Celtic." Although a few individuals emerge as important figures in the context of this book, for the most part I have attempted to analyze the ideas and concepts of "Celticness" held by a wide section of the populations of Ireland and Wales. The convenient shorthand I use to describe these often-diverse people is *nationalists*, broken down further into *cultural nationalists* and *political nationalists*. Again, these terms are to be understood in the broadest sense. By *political nationalists* I mean people who have expressed an interest in some form of political autonomy for their nation, and by *cultural nationalists* I mean people who wish to promote or preserve a particular aspect of what they believe to be their native culture. By this definition, there were people in both Ireland and Wales who could be labeled cultural nationalists but not political nationalists, and, perhaps less frequently, vice versa. In discussing those who made organized efforts toward preserving the Irish language, I regularly describe these people as *activists*. Although it is not a term that these people would have used themselves, I think it is an appropriate description for them. Furthermore, *activist* appears to be a better choice than *enthusiast*, a word that has come under increasing suspicion within Irish-speaking circles because it implies that those who wish to promote the Irish language are mere "hobbyists." I do occasionally use *enthusiast* in place of *activist* in this

book, but only to avoid monotony in my writing. Also, to avoid excessive repetition of the words *Wales* and *Ireland*, I occasionally employ *the Principality* and *the Emerald Isle* respectively as synonyms. These terms are slightly problematic, because some Welsh people feel that *Principality* contains an implication that Wales is not a "real" nation, while some Irish people find *Emerald Isle* to be grating. Having considered all the alternatives, I decided to use these terms because they are the least likely to confuse readers. No derogatory insinuations or romantic sentimentalizations are intended by their inclusion.

A final word on translation. A considerable amount of the source material for this book was written in Irish or Welsh. Unfortunately, constraints of space meant that the original material, which I translated into English, could not be included. All translations in this book, including any errors or mistakes, are mine alone.

CHAPTER 1

THE COMING OF THE CELTS

In March 2015, an article entitled "The Fine-Scale Genetic Structure of the British Population" appeared in the journal *Nature*, reporting on the recent conclusions of a genetic study on the population of the United Kingdom.[1] The findings showed that there was a great deal of genetic difference between various regions of the country. One conclusion that appeared to baffle researchers and the general public alike was that there was no common genetic link between the supposedly Celtic peoples of Britain and Ireland. Professor Mark Robinson, an archaeologist at Oxford University who was a member of the research team, was quoted as saying, "I had assumed at the very early stages of the project that there was going to be this uniform Celtic fringe extending from Cornwall through to Wales into Scotland. And this has very definitely not been the case." Peter Donnelly, a geneticist and colleague of Robinson's at Oxford, stated, "One might have expected those groups to be quite similar genetically because they were Celtic. But while we see distinct groups in those regions, they are amongst the most different." Robinson said that these findings had left him "very surprised."[2]

It says something powerful about how widely accepted the idea of a Celtic identity is that highly educated people could be surprised by the fact that the people of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall do not share the same genetic makeup. Yet this revelation was shocking because it challenged, indeed completely undermined, the popularly held assumption

that the Welsh, Irish, and Scottish populations were the descendants of the ancient Celts who once dominated Britain, Ireland, and continental Europe. While overt celebrations of a common Celtic bond are rare between the people of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, the belief that some kind of affinity exists between them is widely accepted in all three countries. During their campaign of violence, the Provisional IRA never attacked targets or detonated bombs in Wales or Scotland because they accepted the idea that they shared an ethnic connection with the Welsh and Scottish. IRA statements included rhetoric claiming that they stood "with our Celtic brothers and other subject nations of Europe." Such sentiment is still common today. Journalists and online commenters regularly use terms like *our Celtic neighbors* or *our Celtic cousins* when referring to the people from one of the other Celtic nations.[3]

The use of the term *Celtic cousins* is particularly telling. Aside from the obvious attraction of alliteration, the word *cousin* reinforces the idea that a relationship based on family ties and blood exists between the three populations. Indeed, one could go as far to argue that in the twenty-first century the only clear basis for the existence of a Celtic connection is an assumed shared genetic heritage.[4] The Celtic people live in Ireland, and various corners of Britain and France, so geography does not offer any clear basis for unity. Linguistically, the Celtic languages are related, but they are not all mutually intelligible, nor are they spoken by a majority in any of the Celtic countries, so this isn't the foundation for the bond either. The modern Celts do not have a common culture, or rather (and leaving aside Brittany for the moment) it is more accurate to say that they have an extensive common culture, but since they share much of this with the rest of the Anglophone world, it cannot be called uniquely Celtic. Furthermore, the fact that the English language and English-based customs are viewed as having being imposed on the Celtic nations by way of conquest makes any emphasis on the actual shared cultural traits of the contemporary Celts all the less appealing. All that remains, then, is an assumed ancient biological connection. Of course, in a post-Nazi world, most people are quite wary about championing any identity based on shared bloodlines. In the case of the Celts, the idea of a racial bond among them is rarely openly spoken of. It is merely implied, existing subtly in terms like *Celtic cousins* or *Celtic brothers*. Furthermore, as the populations of the Celtic countries are relatively small, and

as no Pan-Celtic state exists in which a government might abuse any biological sense of Celticness, there seems to be no political danger in believing that the Welsh, Irish, and Scottish share much of their DNA. In terms of its minimal, almost subconscious, acknowledgment and nonthreatening implications, Celticness has been a most benign form of racial identity.

But now the possibility of any scientific foundation for this ethnic Celtic identity has been removed. Mark Robinson may have been surprised by this development, but others were not. When we think of the Celts, we envision marauding warriors terrorizing the civilized people of Europe in antiquity. We remember figures like Brennus, the Celtic leader who invaded Greece and later sacked Rome itself in 390 BCE. The populations of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland naturally assume that these Iron Age Continental Celts were their ancestors, who migrated to the islands on the northwestern fringe of Europe sometime in the distant past. Why wouldn't they? The use of the term *Celtic* to identify an ancient people and a modern people clearly suggests that they are, on some level, the same. This is shown by the presence of a replica of the sculpture *The Dying Galatian* in Leinster House, seat of the Irish government in Dublin. This sculpture, dating back to the Roman Empire, depicts a naked Celtic warrior who has been wounded in battle and is struggling to get back to his feet. By placing this sculpture in the home of the Dáil, the government is celebrating the link between the Irish of today and the Celts who lived on the Continent over two millennia ago. These ideas are not just assumed: they are actively taught. I remember being a student at University College Cork taking courses in Celtic civilization in 2002. Lectures about the archaeological findings at the Celtic sites of Halstatt (in modern Austria) and La Tène (Switzerland) were given alongside discussions of the early medieval literature of Ireland and Wales. The message was unambiguous. Those people who lived in the middle of Europe before the birth of Christ were essentially the same as the individuals who, living in Britain and Ireland centuries later, wrote down the tales of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and the *Mabinogion*.

In recent decades, however, the belief that the ancient people who inhabited Ireland and Britain were Celts has come under increasing attack. In 1992, Malcolm Chapman published *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth*. A social anthropologist, Chapman first questioned whether any group had ever self-identified as Celts in antiquity, noting that the name was used by

Greek and Roman writers to label the barbarous hordes beyond their northern borders. As he was skeptical about the existence of the "original" Celts, it is not surprising that Chapman also believed that the modern conception of Celtic identity was essentially based on a falsehood. Chapman was adamant that the only thing that bound the ancient Celts and the modern Celts together was the "continuity of symbolic opposition between a central defining power and its own fringes."[5] In other words, the concept of the Celt was something that had primarily been projected onto Celts by other people, rather than a strong sense of identity they claimed for themselves. This process was, according to Chapman, reversed by the coming of Romanticism, when some Irish, Welsh, and Scottish writers embraced a Celtic identity as a way of rejecting materialistic, urban, industrial England. These poets and writers believed they were reclaiming an almost extinct sense of spiritualism and heroism from the Celtic past, seemingly unaware that the link between contemporary Celts and the Celts of antiquity was somewhat tenuous.

Archaeologists have also challenged the idea that Celts from the Continent migrated to Britain and Ireland and settled them as Celtic colonies. In *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention*, Simon James notes that for much of the twentieth century archaeologists believed that Britain and Ireland had been overrun by a series of Celtic invasions. Yet James argues that much of the evidence to support this hypothesis has been undermined. He observes that, unlike in the Po Valley, where archaeology clearly supports the idea that an invasion from beyond the Alps took place in the fifth century BCE, the evidence for a similar event in either Britain or Ireland is lacking. Simply put, if the Celts came to either Ireland or Britain, we would expect to find evidence of the sudden arrival of a new culture through changes in art, burial customs, farming systems, and house construction. Instead, archaeological evidence suggests considerable continuity between Bronze Age Britain and Ireland and the Iron Age that followed. Meanwhile, artifacts that point toward some kind of shared cultural connection between the Continental Celts and what James refers to as the "Atlantic Celts" are rare.[6] Serious doubts have been raised, then, regarding the legitimacy of the claim that the modern Welsh, Scottish, and Irish people are the direct descendants of the ancient Celts. This is, to borrow a term from Patrick Sim-Williams, "the problem of Celticity."[7] A sense of Celtic

identity clearly exists today, but what exactly is meant by *Celtic*, and what things should and should not be categorized under this label, remain ambiguous.

So how did the Celts become Celts? The story begins with George Buchanan, a Scottish scholar. In 1582, the last year of his life, Buchanan published *The History of Scotland*, claiming, on the basis of his study of the Gaelic and Welsh languages, that the ancient Irish, Scottish, and Welsh peoples "appear . . . to have sprung from the Gauls."[8] To support this idea, Buchanan quoted the Roman historian Tacitus, who observed that the language of Gaul did not "differ widely" from that of ancient Britain. From this, Buchanan inferred that the two languages were "formerly the same" and he compared ancient place-names from Britain and France as proof of the linguistic relationship.[9] At around the same time, the English historian William Camden had largely come to the same conclusion as Buchanan regarding the relationship between the people of Gaul and the Welsh. Both Buchanan and Camden had also noted that the Gauls were Celts, with Buchanan referring to the Irish as Celts who came to Ireland via Spain.[10] While neither wrote that the aboriginal people of Ireland and Britain were collectively Celts, readers could clearly come to that conclusion on their own. These ideas were taken up again over a century later by Paul-Yves Pezron, an abbot from Brittany. In 1703, Pezron published *Antiquité de la nation, et de langue des Celtes, autrement appellez Gaulois*. Pezron began his project by trying to trace the ancestry of the Breton people back to the book of Genesis. In doing so, he claimed that the Breton people were the descendants of the Gauls who had once occupied modern France. Pezron, like Buchanan and Camden before him, asserted that these Gauls were really the Celts who had inhabited much of continental Europe. At the same time, Pezron also commented on the similarity of the Welsh language to Breton. This was not new; earlier antiquarians had already noted that Welsh and Breton had surely once been the same language.[11]

However, Pezron was frustratingly vague about why he was so sure that the Bretons and Welsh were descendants of the Gauls. He noted that "the Bretons of France and the Welsh in Great Britain, have still the same language, that in the time of Julius Caesar and Augustus was spoken through all Gaul." But evidence to support this claim, which became central to the idea that the people of Britain were Celts, was not forthcoming. Pezron

simply wrote, "This is a matter that needs no proof; the learned own the truth of it."[12] Nor did Pezron explain why it was that the Welsh and Breton people spoke a similar language. According to medieval sources, Brittany had been settled by Welsh speakers from Britain beginning in the fourth century, a hypothesis that modern archaeologists support.[13] But this presents a complication for Pezron's claim that the Bretons and Welsh were essentially the same people as the Gauls and therefore Celts. If the Bretons were the last remnants in France of an ancient Gaulish culture, then the similarity of the Breton language to Welsh would be convincing proof that the Britons and Gauls were one and the same. But if the linguistic similarity between Breton and Welsh was due to a migration that took place centuries after the Roman conquest of Gaul, then the related nature of the two languages could not be evidence by itself that the ancient Britons were basically Gauls and, by extension, Celts. Pezron said nothing about any migration from Wales to Brittany. But in observing that contemporary Bretons took their culture "from the ancient Gauls, whose language and customs they still retain, as being descended from them," he certainly seemed to suggest that Brittany was the last redoubt of ancient Gaul, rather than a later Welsh colony.[14] Despite (or perhaps, because) of these ambiguities, Pezron had reintroduced the possibility that the prehistoric people of Britain were Celts. Like Buchanan and Camden before him, Pezron never called the Welsh a Celtic people, nor did he directly state that the Celts had invaded Britain, but both conclusions were very much implied in his work.[15] He also said nothing about a possible kinship between the Welsh and the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland, but the concept of British Celts was gaining traction.

The ideas of Pezron were expanded further by his contemporary, a linguist by the name of Edward Lhuyd. Born in England to Welsh parents, Lhuyd was fascinated with Pezron's book, in part because he was simultaneously studying the relationship between the various languages of Britain and Ireland. In 1707, Lhuyd published *Archaeologia Britannica: An Account of the Languages, Histories and Customs of Great Britain, from Travels through Wales, Cornwall, Bas-Bretagne, Ireland and Scotland*. In his book, Lhuyd concurred with Pezron that the Brythonic languages of Britain, namely Welsh and Cornish, had originated in Gaul. But, like Pezron, Lhuyd was a little unclear on the details. He suggested that "Gaulish" was actually a collective name for several nations, only some of whom spoke a Celtic lan-

guage. At the same time, he stated that the Gaulish language, now extinct, could be "in great measure retrieved" by comparative study of the indigenous languages of Britain and Ireland.[16] In other words, the modern languages of Britain were descended directly from Gaulish. Like Buchanan, Lhuyd felt that the resemblance in the names of people and places in ancient Britain and Gaul offered proof that their languages were related. But Lhuyd went further than this. Through an empirical comparative study, he revealed that the Goidelic languages, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx Gaelic, were also related to Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. Although Buchanan had hinted at this, Lhuyd's work represented the first time that this group of tongues had been recognized collectively as forming a single language family. Lhuyd claimed that while the Brythonic languages had come to Britain through migration from Gaul, the Goidelic languages had similarly arrived in Ireland, Scotland, and Man via an invasion from Spain.

Lhuyd was hesitant to refer to the speakers of these languages as Celts, nor did he declare that these languages should be called Celtic. However, in his preface, he did call the comparative section of his book "a sort of Latin-Celtic dictionary." He also referred in passing to the languages of Wales, Brittany, and Cornwall as "Celtique."[17] These humble sentences eventually led to a complete reimagining of the ancient history of Britain and Ireland. Lhuyd's evidence had proved that the Brythonic and Goidelic languages were related. By referring to a "Latin-Celtic dictionary," Lhuyd implied that the indigenous languages of Britain and Ireland, as well as ancient Gaulish, could be collectively labeled Celtic. If these were Celtic languages, and they were brought to Britain and Ireland by a Celtic migration from Gaul and Spain, then the only conclusion one could draw was that the Irish, Welsh, and Scottish were Celts. No one called these people Celtic in 1700, but by 1900 a sense of Celticness was deeply entwined in the perception of national character in Wales and Ireland particularly.

So now we know where and when the idea of the British and Irish Celtic populations stemmed from, and the question becomes "When did the people of Ireland and Wales start regularly referring to themselves as Celts?" Simon James writes that once the Irish and Welsh languages were called Celtic "the label was quickly used also to describe cultural or national *identities*, past and present; and both ideas became accepted as established fact throughout Britain and Ireland with remarkable speed."[18] Certainly

historians and antiquarians of the eighteenth century began to use the term *Celtic*. Charles O'Conor, in his *Dissertations on the ancient history of Ireland* (1753), referred to the Irish, Welsh, and Scottish nations as "Celtic Countries" or "Celtic Peoples," although for the most part he used the adjective *Celtic* only when referring to languages.

Yet it is interesting to note that these writers, as well as others, mostly tended to describe the ancient people of Britain and Ireland, rather than their more modern descendants, as Celtic. Furthermore, several books written in the eighteenth century that we might expect to refer to a Celtic past simply didn't. Focusing just on Ireland for the moment, Henry Brookes, in his *Essay on the Ancient and Modern State of Ireland* (1760) uses the word *Celtic* only once. Meanwhile in Thomas Comerford's *History of Ireland from the Earliest Account of Time, to the Invasion of the English under King Henry II* (1752), Charles Smith's *Ancient and present state of the county and city of Cork. Containing a natural, civil, ecclesiastical, historical, and topographical description thereof* (1750), and Thomas Leland's *History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II* (1773), among others, the word *Celtic* is never used at all. Clearly, then, Simon James's assertion that the practice of referring to the ancient and contemporary people of Britain and Ireland was quickly and widely adopted after 1707 needs to be qualified. It was used by some people, certainly, but not all and, at least in the eighteenth century, was far more likely to be used as a label for the distant past and indigenous languages of Britain and Ireland rather than describing the people we call the Celts today.

Despite this ambiguity about when the people of Ireland and Wales referred to themselves as Celts, scholars often fall into the trap of adopting the contemporary use of *Celtic* and applying it uncritically to the past. For example, in his essay on the impact of the Reformation on Ireland and Wales, Brendan Bradshaw refers to the two countries as "the English crown's two Celtic borderland dominions."[19] To call Ireland and Wales "Celtic borderlands" in the sixteenth century is anachronistic and seems particularly misplaced in an essay exploring "identity formation." Murray Pittock, in *Celtic Identity and the British Image*, writes that in the eighteenth century the Jacobite Risings had an "implicit threat of Celtic irredentism" and indeed that for most of British history a continuing tension existed between those loyal to the state and the Celtic "other."[20] To demonstrate this, Pittock describes some of the insulting caricatures penned about the Welsh, Irish, and Scot-

tish, and his book shows several images depicting the Scots as uncivilized barbarians. The problem is that none of his examples from the eighteenth century refer to the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh people, either collectively or individually, as Celts. English writers in the 1700s certainly had many derogatory things to say about these people, but calling them Celts does not appear to be one of them. The example of these writers shows how a sense of an ancient Celtic heritage is fostered. By applying the contemporary use of the term *Celtic* to people who did not use it, these historical writers are unintentionally giving the concept of the Celt a historical validation it does not merit.

We have seen that the use of *Celtic* in the eighteenth century was sporadic and that it was primarily used to describe the ancient, rather than the modern, people of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. But when did this change? A word search of Irish and Welsh newspaper digital archives offers some clues. By entering the word *Celtic* into a search engine, one can track the increased use of the term over the course of the nineteenth century. Such methodology naturally has limitations: we cannot tell what the concept of being Celtic meant to readers or how they understood it in terms of their day-to-day existence. But we can see in what decade readers were more likely to encounter the word *Celtic* in their newspaper and can assume that this reflected a more widespread use in society as a whole. Table 1 shows how often Irish newspapers in the nineteenth century used *Celtic* in their pages.

Table 1. Irish Newspapers

Time Period	No. of newspapers	Total no. of times *Celtic* used	Average no. of times used per paper over period
Pre-1800	3	12	4
1800–1819	3	30	10
1820–39	9	143	16
1840–49	14	1046	75
1850–59	14	2170	155
1860–69	16	2482	155
1870–79	16	4651	291
1880–89	21	5342	254
1890–99	25	4702	188

While these bare numbers cannot fully explain the complex process involved in the Irish population's adoption of a sense of Celticness over the course of the nineteenth century, they certainly offer an indication of when this process took place. At the end of the eighteenth century, the small number of Irish newspapers rarely made use of the term *Celtic*, which would suggest, as has already been put forward, that the word was not widely used as a marker of Irish identity at that time. Indeed, we do not see a dramatic increase in usage of *Celtic* until after 1840; then after 1850 the regularity with which the word is used doubles again. While the growing number of newspapers partly explains the increased regularity, individual newspapers on average were far more likely to refer to something or someone as Celtic in 1865 than in 1835.

In Wales, similar trends existed, as can be seen in the analysis of Welsh newspapers in table 2. Broadly speaking, we observe the same increasing usage of *Celtic* over the course of the nineteenth century. In particular, 1870 or thereabouts appears to be the year when we see a dramatic growth. But there are a number of interesting differences as well. In Ireland, the regularity with which the word *Celtic* was used in newspapers increased markedly between 1840 and 1860, but in Wales the growth was much less pronounced. Meanwhile, in Ireland, the regularity with which *Celtic* appeared in print peaked in the 1870s, declining somewhat over the last two decades of the century, while in Wales the use of *Celtic* increased fourfold after 1870. In short, Wales seems to have lagged behind Ireland in terms of when its newspapers began using the word *Celtic*, and the Welsh organs seem to have been far less likely than their Irish equivalents to refer to something as Celtic. The latter is more easily explained. There are far more Welsh titles than Irish ones included in the digital archives. Many of the Welsh newspapers were local in their focus and therefore perhaps less likely to have columns or articles that explored questions of race and national identity, where we might expect the *Celtic* adjective to be used. Hence the statistic for average use may have been diluted by the inclusion of numerous, predominantly local, papers. The earlier enthusiasm for the *Celtic* label on the part of Irish newspapers is more of a mystery. It is possible that because a distinctly Welsh form of nationalist politics did not emerge until the 1870s Welsh writers were less likely to refer to their Celtic distinctiveness within the British state until this time, whereas Irish journalists had already been doing so for decades.

Table 2. Welsh Newspapers

Time period	No. of newspapers	Total no. of times *Celtic* used	Average no. of times used per paper over period
1804–20	3	46	15
1821–39	8	188	24
1840–49	9	319	35
1850–59	18	358	20
1860–69	37	624	17
1870–79	45	3639	81
1880–89	56	4526	81
1890–99	71	9257	130

At any rate, after 1860 or so, more people in Ireland and Wales were reading, and presumably using, the word *Celtic* than ever before. But what was happening to explain this proliferation of Celticness? First, a newly defined concept of race was emerging in the middle of the nineteenth century. For centuries Western science, guided by the teachings of the Bible, had accepted the common origin of all humankind. But at the end of the eighteenth century, in the wake of growing contact between Europe and the rest of the world, some scientists, like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, put forward a theory of polygenism, claiming that different human groups had evolved separately from one another and were different species. As a result, people in the nineteenth century increasingly believed that cultural differences between groups could be explained by their separate biological inheritance. The study of linguistics, meanwhile, seemed to offer an insight into the relationship between humans. Broadly speaking, each language was assumed to mark a subspecies of the various human races. Many of those interested in the biology of humankind were also interested in the evolution of languages, so it is not startling that knowledge from one field transferred to the other. James Cowles Prichard, for example, was an English physician who wrote about racial differences in humans as well as the relationship between the Celtic languages and Sanskrit. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, scientists began to suggest that the Celtic languages were spoken, or at least had been spoken, by a distinct Celtic race. George Gliddon and Josiah Nott, influenced by the polygenist ideas of Samuel George

Norton, published *Types of Mankind* in 1854. Like Hall, Nott and Gliddon argued that the Celts were a subgroup of Caucasians, claiming that "the Celts who, with the cognate Gauls, at one period, extended their tribes from Asia Minor to the British Islands, are now chiefly confined, as an unmixed people, to the west and southwest of Ireland."[21] Hence, from the 1850s onward, there was a growing acceptance of the Celts as a distinct race, separate from England not merely in terms of culture but in terms of biology also.

At the same time that scientists created the idea of a Celtic race, writers were discussing what specific characteristics the Celts possessed. In 1854, the French philosopher Ernest Renan published *La poésie des races celtiques* (The poetry of the Celtic races). While Renan's essay mostly focused on Welsh and Breton literature, it also offered an insight into the unique traits of the Celtic race. First, however, Renan had to clarify who exactly the Celts were. He wrote, "I ought to point out that by the word *Celtic* I designate here, not the whole of the great race which, at a remote epoch, formed the population of nearly the whole of Western Europe, but simply the four groups which, in our days, still merit this name, as opposed to the Teutons and to the Neo-Latin peoples." These four groups were "(1) The inhabitants of Wales or Cambria, and the peninsula of Cornwall, bearing even now the ancient name of *Cymry*; (2) the *Bretons bretonnants*, or dwellers in French Brittany speaking Bas-Breton, who represent an emigration of the Cymry from Wales; (3) the Gaels of the North of Scotland speaking Gaelic; (4) the Irish, although a very profound line of demarcation separates Ireland from the rest of the Celtic family."[22] The fact that Renan had to spell out who exactly he was talking about shows us that even in the 1850s the Celticness of the Irish, Welsh, Scots, and Bretons was not necessarily widely known or appreciated.

Renan began his essay by highlighting just how different the Celtic nations were from the rest of Europe in terms both of their physical appearance and the environment they inhabited:

> Every one who travels through the Armorican peninsula experiences a change of the most abrupt description. . . . A cold wind arises full of a vague sadness, and carries the soul to other thoughts; the tree-tops are bare and twisted; the heath with its monotony of tint stretches away into the distance; at every step the granite protrudes from a soil too

> scanty to cover it; a sea that is almost always sombre girdles the horizon with eternal moaning. . . . A like change is apparent, I am told, in passing from England into Wales, from the Lowlands of Scotland, English by language and manners, into the Gaelic Highlands; and too, though with a perceptible difference, when one buries oneself in the districts of Ireland where the race has remained pure from all admixture of alien blood. It seems like entering on the subterranean strata of another world, and one experiences in some measure the impression given us by Dante, when he leads us from one circle of his Inferno to another.[23]

What is interesting to note is that Renan is not talking about the Celts of yore but rather the people still living in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany. Antiquarians in the eighteenth century had mostly discussed the Celts in the past tense, referring to the ancient ancestors of the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish. But the new language of race was changing how people conceptualized the relationship between the past and present. If race was a scientific, objective category, then it stood to reason that the differences that had once marked the Celts apart from the other people of Europe would still exist in some regard in the contemporary world. Renan, then, was collapsing the distinction between the Celts of antiquity and the people living on the western seaboard of Europe. He wrote, "Sufficient attention is not given to the peculiarity of this fact of an ancient race living, until our days and almost under our eyes, its own life in some obscure islands and peninsulas in the West . . . still faithful to its own tongue, to its own memories, to its own customs."[24]

Renan's ideas came before the public at almost the exact same time as another important milestone in the development of the modern Celtic identity, namely, the publication of Johann Kaspar Zeuss's *Grammatica Celtica* in 1853. Zeuss, professor of history at the lyceum in Speier, undertook exhaustive research over thirteen years to produce his magnum opus. Written in Latin, Zeuss's *Grammatica Celtica* drew two major conclusions: (1) the Celtic languages were part of the Indo-European language family, and (2) the division in the Celtic languages lay between its Goedelic and Brittonic branches, and not between Continental and Insular (Britain and Ireland) Celtic languages. Far more than this, however, was the fact that

Zeuss's labors brought rigorous scientific methodologies and a sense of scholarly gravitas to the study of the indigenous languages of Britain and Ireland, something the field had lacked before *Grammatica Celtica*. Zeuss had created a new academic discipline in the study of Celtic linguistics, and in his wake universities in Britain and Europe devoted more resources to the study of Celtic matters.[25] Combined with naturalist studies that included the Celts as a distinct race, scholarly research on the Celtic languages gave a further scientific foundation to an emerging sense of Celticness. The average person in Ireland and Wales in the late nineteenth century might not have known much about the various debates in Celtic linguistics, but many were aware that Continental scholars were intensely interested in Celtic affairs, giving a greater legitimacy to their own emerging sense of Celtic identity.

At the same time that Zeuss's research was earning plaudits among Europe's linguists, archaeological discoveries in Switzerland brought more glamour to Celtic affairs. In 1857, an archaeologist named Hans Kopp collected forty iron swords near the village of La Tène, on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel. This discovery highlighted to scholars the importance this site must have had in the ancient world, and a flurry of further explorations followed. In 1863, another Swiss archaeologist, Ferdinand Keller, announced that the La Tène site was the remains of an ancient Celtic settlement, as the stilt houses that had been excavated at the lake appeared to be identical to those of the Helvetti, the Celtic tribe described by Julius Caesar in his *De bello Gallico*.[26] This idea was taken further by Hans Hildebrand, who, as general secretary to the Congrès Internationale d'Anthropologie et d'Archéologie Préhistorique held in Stockholm in 1874, told his audience that Iron Age Europe had been dominated by the Celts. Hildebrand noted that there had been two distinctive Celtic societies, an earlier, more primitive one (Halstatt) and a more advanced, later culture (La Tène).[27] As Lake Neuchâtel continued to yield more artifacts, it became clear that the people who had once lived there were not only skilled metalworkers but also artistic, as evident from the beautiful swirling patterns and spiral designs that appeared on their weapons and tools. This helped reshape the traditional image of the ancient Celts in Europe, from warrior barbarians to sophisticated craftsmen. Naturally, the idea that a Celtic civilization had once been widespread across continental Europe made this Celtic identity all the more attractive

to Welsh and Irish nationalists, and the story of the ancient Celts was increasingly adopted into the nationalist histories of these respective countries.

Perhaps the most famous contribution to the Celtic discussion came from an English poet, Matthew Arnold. For the most part, Arnold portrayed the Celtic peoples as a sentimental race, full of poetry and romantic whims but ultimately doomed to fail in the modern world because of their lack of discipline. He wrote, "*Sentiment* is, however, the word which marks where the Celtic races really touch and are one; sentimental, if the Celtic nature is to be characterised by a single term, is the best term to take. . . . Sentimental,—*Always ready to react against the despotism of fact*."[28] The Celts were dreamers, in other words, unable to negotiate the material and practical realities of industrialized society, in large part because they could not accept "fact." If any group of people were to thrive, Arnold argued, they required balance, measure, and patience. Unfortunately, "Balance, measure, and patience are just what the Celt has never had."[29] Arnold depicted the Celts as romantic losers. They might show a great talent for music, but "What has the Celt, so eager for emotion that he has not patience for science, effected in music, to be compared with what the less emotional German, steadily developing his musical feeling with the science of a Sebastian Bach or a Beethoven, has effected?" The Celtic people, Arnold claimed, had a deeply poetic nature, but their lack of reason prevented them from producing master poets: "The Celt has not produced great poetical works. . . . His want of sanity and steadfastness has kept the Celt back from the highest success."[30]

If Arnold believed that Celtic sentiment hindered the ability of the people of Ireland, Wales, and the other Celtic nations to compose music or poetry of the highest caliber, then he saw them as even less suited to the world of politics and business: "The skilful and resolute appliance of means to ends which is needed both to make progress in material civilisation, and also to form powerful states, is just what the Celt has least turn for."[31] The Celts might once have harassed and harried the civilized world, but they lacked the right temperament to form their own organized political entity. The Celt, being "undisciplinable, anarchical, and turbulent by nature, but out of affection and admiration giving himself body and soul to some leader," did not have "a promising political temperament." In fact, it was "just the opposite of the Anglo-Saxon temperament, disciplinable and

steadily obedient within certain limits, but retaining an inalienable part of freedom and self-dependence."[32] To the modern reader, this might sound like an incredibly unflattering commentary to make about any group, but Arnold insisted that the same sentimentality and lack of discipline that hindered the Celts in the modern world was also worthy of admiration. Their romantic nature, he believed, was a positive counterbalance to the stoic but unimaginative Teutonic character of England. Within a short period of time, Arnold's characterization of the Celts could be found in newspaper editorials and books across the United Kingdom. Perhaps more than any other person, Arnold helped popularize the idea that the people of Ireland and Wales had distinctive character traits that pointed to a common racial identity among their populations and a different biological heritage from the people of England.

Thus the Celtic identity was born. Simon James has claimed, with some justification, that these developments mark one of the clearest examples of "ethnogenesis" in modern Europe.[33] An ethnic identity that simply didn't exist in 1700 was claimed by millions of people less than two hundred years later. At first, the concept of a Celtic identity had mostly (though not exclusively) been confined to discussions about distant history. This changed in the middle of the nineteenth century. Over a twenty-year period, linguistic scholars gave the Celts a sense of prestige, scientists gave them a racial categorization, archaeologists gave them a glorious past, and littérateurs gave them easily identifiable characteristics. Other factors contributed as well. In the face of growing anglicization in Wales and Ireland, Celticness offered a durable foundation upon which to construct a national identity, as well as a sense of common bond among the other groups in the United Kingdom in the face of England's growing political, industrial, and demographic might. Perhaps most importantly of all, rising literacy and an accelerating rate of growth in the number of newspapers brought regular reminders to Irish and Welsh readers of their Celtic heritage. As a result, politicians, writers, and journalists in both countries were more likely to look across the Irish Sea and compare their nation to its Celtic counterpart in a way that their predecessors would not have done. What followed was a sustained flow of commentary and ideas between Ireland and Wales that significantly shaped both countries' modern development.