



## Learning Activity Progression Step 4

This resource provides learning activities for your students using People's Collection Wales. It is one of a series of nine relating to Patagonia for KS3.

Establishment of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia

The Voyage of the Mimosa, 1865

The Native Patagonians and the Welsh Settlers

Early days in Patagonia

'Crossing the Patagonian plains': from the Camwy Valley to Cwm Hyfryd

Dark times – Floods and Emigration

Early Schools in the Welsh Settlement - Patagonia

**History of the Welsh Language in Patagonia**

Chapels and Churches in Patagonia



## The history of the Welsh language in Patagonia



## By Culturenet Cymru

### Introduction

*'But if a Welsh settlement were established, Welsh emigrants would feel more at home, and as long as they felt that the foundations of a Welsh state are being laid down, where Welsh was the language of Parliament and the law was administered in Welsh, they would be far bolder and more public-spirited in order to carry out patriotic schemes.'* Michael D. Jones, 'Gwladychfa Gymreig', c. 1860

### Tasks and learning objectives

1. The crown
2. Welsh culture in Patagonia today
3. Welshness
4. Culture
5. National identity
6. Welsh customs
7. Welsh

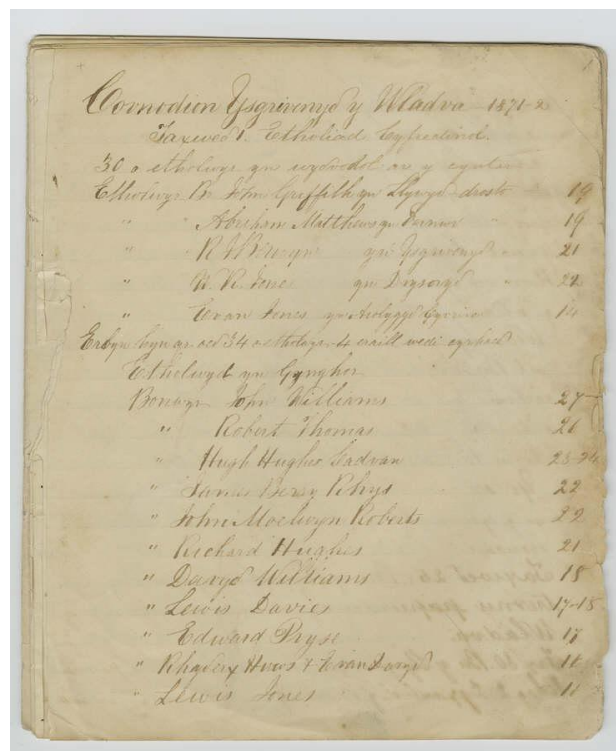
[Download the Collection of images and worksheets for this activity from People's Collection Wales](#)

## The history of the Welsh language in Patagonia

'But if a Welsh settlement were established, Welsh emigrants would feel more at home, and as long as they felt that the foundations of a Welsh state are being laid down, where Welsh was the language of Parliament and the law was administered in Welsh, they would be far bolder and more public-spirited in order to carry out patriotic schemes.' Michael D. Jones, 'Gwladychfa Gymreig', c. 1860

Emigration was an ordinary aspect of life in nineteenth-century Wales. Economic hardship, above anything else, that caused thousands of Welsh people to leave their native communities in search of a better life in the United States. Yet, while there was hope of a better standard of living in North America, many immigrants were aware of the danger that they would lose their national characteristics as they and their descendents assimilated into American society. Michael D. Jones observed this tendency during a visit to the United States in 1848-9 and he was convinced of the need for a Welsh settlement as a means of safeguarding the language, customs and religion of his compatriots. He believed that the Welsh language was the most important of the three, and that the preservation of the other two depended on its use by Welsh immigrants. In Jones's mind, the establishment of a settlement where the Welsh language had official status would allow the national identity of the immigrants to flourish unhindered.

This vision was realised in the early years of the Welsh settlement in Patagonia. One of the last things that the immigrants did before departing from Liverpool was to elect twelve persons to sit on the Settlement's governing council, the proceedings of which were conducted entirely through the medium of Welsh.



Covnodion Ysgrivenydd y Wladva 1871-2, page 1, [image 1 of 15]

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However, as the Settlement showed signs of progress in the early 1870s, the Argentine government tightened its grasp on its political development. A port official was sent to the Settlement in 1874, and a National Commissary in 1875. This marked the beginning of a period of tension between the settlers and the Argentine authorities in the Camwy Valley. The Commissary claimed to have superiority over the Council, which undermined Michael D. Jones's hopes of maintaining official status for the Welsh language in the Settlement.

Despite these developments, all kinds of social and religious activities at the Camwy Valley were held through the medium of Welsh in the 1880s. The publication of the newspaper 'Y Drafod' in January 1891 was an important milestone in the history of the Settlement. The intention of the editor Lewis Jones was to use Y Drafod to support and promote Welsh culture in the Settlement and it contained articles on a wide range of subjects.



However, by the end of the 1890s, the future of the Settlement as a Welsh-speaking community was under threat. There was a decline in the number of immigrants from Wales and an increase in immigrants from other cultural backgrounds. The Government displayed a greater desire than ever to establish a higher level of unity and uniformity. In the field of education, for example, legislation was introduced in 1896 to ensure that Spanish was the medium of teaching in all national primary schools.

Over the following decades, the Welsh language disappeared from public life and became the language of the hearth and chapel, a status similar to that in Wales. But things went further. In the 1930s, the Argentine military authorities prohibited the Welsh from attempting to revive the language in any way. Although children could receive some degree of Welsh education at the Intermediate School that was opened in Gaiman in 1906, this was a bleak period in the history of the Welsh language at the Settlement. Indeed, the Intermediate School was forced to close in the early 1950s because of a substantial decline in the number of pupils.

## The History of the Welsh Language in Patagonia

However, preparations for the centenary of the Settlement in 1965 raised awareness of many people's Welsh roots. In 1963, the Intermediate School was reopened under the leadership of Luned Vychan Roberts de Gonzalez. As part of the celebrations in 1965, the volume 'Gwladfa Patagonia' was published by R. Bryn Williams and several memorials were raised to mark this milestone in the history of the Settlement. The publicity given to this event served to strengthen the link between Argentina and Wales, and some of the Welsh people's descendants expressed a desire to revive the Welsh language in Patagonia.



*A memorial in Trelew to commemorate the centenary of the Welsh Settlement, 2005*

In 1997, the Welsh Language Scheme was launched in Chubut. It is administered by the British Council with the support of the University of Cardiff and the Wales-Argentine Society's Centre for Learning Welsh, and it is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. The primary aim of the scheme is to provide specialized linguistic support in the attempt to revive the Welsh language in Chubut. Such was the success of the Scheme that it attracted interest from individuals who had no familial connections with Wales. In 2005 there were 62 Welsh classes in the province and Welsh was part of the curriculum in two primary schools and two colleges in the Gaiman catchment area. Monday, 6 March 2006, was an important day in the history of the Welsh language in Patagonia – Ysgol yr Hendre, Trelew, was opened to teach children between three and five years of age through the medium of Welsh and Spanish. The education authorities in Chubut not only authorised the establishment of the school but also supports its aims.



*Gaiman secondary school - Coleg Camwy, 2005*

Since its establishment in 1939, Cymdeithas Cymru-Ariannin (Wales-Argentina Society) has been an important link between Wales and Patagonia. It is a charitable organization which receives its income entirely from its members. The money is used to promote the Welsh connection by sponsoring exchange visits for teachers, students and ministers. Students from Patagonia are sponsored to attend Welsh courses at Lampeter every summer. Also, an annual competition is sponsored at the National Eisteddfod and education establishments in Patagonia.

The impact of efforts to revive and maintain the Welsh language in Patagonia is clearly visible. At the National Eisteddfod in Llanelli (2000), Sandra De Pol, a teacher and an editor of the Welsh-Argentine paper 'Llais yr Andes', received the Welsh Learner of the Year award. In Sandra de Pol's opinion, it is important that the children of Chubut have an opportunity 'to learn and to enjoy the history and culture of their forefathers', and she claimed that, for her, the Welsh language had 'opened the door to a new life'.

## Sources

R. Bryn Williams, *Y Wladfa* (Cardiff, 1962)

## Task 1. The Crown

What symbols of Wales or Welshness do you see on this crown?



*The crown of the Welsh Settlement's Eisteddfod*

## Task 2. Welsh culture in Patagonia today

Use other websites to research into Welsh culture in Patagonia today.

## Task 3. Welshness

What is Welshness?

*Record your answers on the worksheet 'What is Welshness?'*

# The History of the Welsh Language in Patagonia

## Task 4. Culture

Does culture belong to a specific place?

## Task 5. National identity

Is the Welsh language an effective way of conveying Welsh national identity?

*Record your answers on the worksheet on 'The Welsh Language'*

## Task 6. Welsh customs

Is it possible to practise Welsh customs without the language?

*Record your answers on the worksheet 'The Welsh Language'*

## Task 7. Welsh

Is it your cultural characteristics that make you Welsh?

*Record your answers on the worksheet 'The Welsh Language'*

# What is Welshness?



## The Welsh Language

maintain customs



convey identity



cultural characteristics

