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A HISTORY

OF

WALES



JOHN DAVIES

'Scrupulously impartial in its attitudes ... holding its 700-page substance is like having all Wales in one's hand'
— *Janet Alexander, Times*

A History of Wales

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Stretching from the Ice Ages to the present day, this masterful account traces the political, social, and cultural history of the land that has come to be called Wales. Spanning prehistoric hill forts and Roman ruins to the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution and the series of strikes by Welsh miners in the late twentieth century, this is the definitive history of an enduring people: a unique and compelling exploration of the origins of the Welsh nation, its development and its role in the modern world.

A History of Wales Details

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From Reader Review A History of Wales for online ebook

Reddogs11 says

i haven't finished reading this book yet, but i wanted to mention what is in it .

i brought the book on-line without reading many reviews(it was recommended as a top book on a history site i like). i brought this book wanting to learn about early welsh history from about 48-1500, but this book is pretty light on the early history, page 1 to 386 is dedicated to fist settlement of wales to 1850, while page 387 to 711 is about wales from 1850 to present, which i wasn't very interested in.

so if you want a good summary on welsh history with a focus on the modern times its a good book but if your more interested in earlier welsh history your better off finding dedicated books to the period.

Tom Jenckes says

It's very thorough. At the same time it's got a lot of details I wasn't interested in. I did find one ancestor in the book. It did help me understand better how Wales dealt with England historically.

Rod says

John Davies is to be commended for the huge amount of time and research he must have invested to produce such a detailed chronology of the Welsh experience.

Annette says

It is the Bible re. the history of Wales, in my point of view. I have read it a couple of times and consult it every now and again.

Paula says

I love reading history. I really wanted to love this book, since I have Welsh ancestry and wanted to understand my roots. I can put up with a lot of dry reading if I feel that I am learning something. With all of the great reviews, I thought for sure this would be a good read. However, this was among the driest reading I have ever struggled through. It was page after page of names, dates and places (with few maps to help locate these) with few enriching details. The author often said things like "This is the Llewellyn ap Owain of

legend." This piqued my interest, but Davies always disappointed me. He gave not even a hint of what those legends might be, or any details of the life that would give me a sense of why he was remembered. It was just one lengthly recital of which leader fought which other leader over some piece of land, for seven hundred pages! Sometimes there was a bit of English, or French history thrown in, since the Welsh were deeply involved with their neighbors, but that was as exciting as it got. Even then it was just a tallying of how many Welsh fought in which battles. I hate to be harsh to any author, since I know how hard it must have been to pull together all of those facts, but good history is more than facts. This is not good history.

Alex says

Very scholarly, very well researched, not the easiest prose to read.

Elizabeth F says

This book takes you from early archeologic history of the British Isles, into written history. It is PACKED (and I do mean packed) with information, such that I have to have a laptop at my side, with a Welsh-English dictionary open, as well as Wikipedia, for a reminder/explanation of whatever event is being discussed. While mostly a straightforward history, Mr Davies does allow himself the occasional twentieth or twenty-first century comment, providing a rare chuckle in the midst of this dense story.

Jon says

I gave it all I had, but it finally crushed my sole at about page 450. I almost made it through, but I could just not read another page. The author's prose, his approach of the subject matter, and the lack of depth of information regarding much of the material was just disappointing. I felt myself not being able to follow his train of thought at times.

The author spent much of the time just covering the different religious movements through out the countryside of the time, while never painting a well fleshed-out picture of the country and its inhabitants. I ended up knowing more than I would have ever liked to about "nonconformist" itinerant preachers and I still couldn't even tell you about any of the major crops or the influences of those on the agricultural/rural economy. Lame.

Michelle says

Man, this was a tough read. Literally took me over two years to slog my way through it, but I finally made it. I do agree and wish the author paid more attention to the personalities, which we all know *make* the very history we enjoy reading. Still, as a non-Welsh, but someone who's very interested in Wales, this provided great insight. Need an update through 2010 as my edition (is there an updated version?) only went through the late 80s.

Elena Sotelo-McCravy says

If ever you want the real story of the English this is it. We have all grown up with the history we believed to be true, kings, queens, etc. But, who really was responsible and who are the people that have kept their own language, are so closely tied to the heritage of the past, that they are almost forgotten. All I know is that this book has given the clearest road from the past to the present. If you love history, want to know where you fit in, take time to read this most important work.

Sam says

While this took me over a month to get through I was kind of glad I persevered with it as it is well researched and very detailed and even I learned a thing or two about my native land that I didn't know. Having said that though it is a very dry read and it does focus on the political and religious side of things a bit too much for my liking, particularly given the diverse characters we have both past and present, not to mention the stories, folklore and tall tales that have been handed down through generations. This is a book I both enjoyed and hated as it captures the details but misses the point (the soul if you will) of Wales, if you're of an academic mind this is perfect for you but if you want to know about the land of song you're going to be disappointed.

Stephanie Griffin says

A HISTORY OF WALES, by John Davies, chronicles the turbulent history of Wales from ancient times until the late part of the 20th century.

Only those familiar with the layout of Wales can really follow the text, as there isn't a general map that shows major cities, rivers, etc. Therefore, it doesn't do a lot of good to tell us that something happened between *this* river and *that* river if we have no idea where those rivers are. Oddly, there are several maps of insignificant items such as "the distribution of hill-forts" and "Poor Law Unions, registration counties and registration districts".

The writing itself has to be some of the driest I've ever come across. Myriad statistics weigh down this 718-page history, and rarely do we get even a glimpse of the personalities behind the names of the participants in the creation of this country.

After slogging through this book, the only things I learned, and which was reiterated throughout, was that the Welsh are a fractious lot, are unable to determine among themselves what it means to be Welsh, the English are fond of creating committees to study them, and they mined a lot of coal. Surely there is more to Wales than this!

I'm a big fan of Wales, and hope to someday visit that great country, but I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone new to studying it, or contemplating going there. Stick with the pretty travel guides!

--Stephanie

Benjamin says

John Davies' *A History of Wales* is quite the comprehensive work on Welsh history! It's a dense volume spanning prehistory until the early 21st century and deserves serious applause.

It did, however, take me an astonishing amount of time to trudge through (15 months off and on). For me, this is because the focus of this "History Of" leans *heavily* towards the politico-religious history of Wales. Davies' discussion of the early Welsh identity up until the closure of its medieval period was a really engaging read. What follows 1536 C.E., with Wales' annexation into England until the advent of the Industrial revolution, became laborious; this is possibly in part due to Wales 'losing' a sense of Welsh identity - so it's not Davies' fault this section diverges in topical "Welshness". That said, his intense focus on the Non-Conformism during this period really drove me away for large periods of time (as the hilariously embarrassing graph of my reading progress shows!).

Only when we get to the Industrial Revolution and the 20th century does the read pick up again, largely because the Welsh identity is stoked and rekindled. Even still, many cultural accomplishments of Wales are still only brushed over such as the literary, musical, sporting and artistic merits of the post-Industrial Wales.

3.5/5

Gaby says

absolutely brilliant, a book full of information

David R. says

Davies takes the long view, and is the case with Penguin Classics, grinds through a workmanlike history of the troubled land of Wales. Despite a few flashes of clever, understated phrasing the book is rather dry and tedious especially in the sections from the 16th through 18th centuries. Davies spends too much time obsessing about the political choices of the Welsh (uniformly anti-England) and not as much diving how the Welsh managed to hold on to so much of their ethnic nationhood despite long odds. Despite my low marks this is a good introduction to an under-covered part of British history.
