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Yr Hen Iaith Barhau: Views of "The Welsh Question"

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YR HEN IAITH BARHAU:
VIEWS OF "THE WELSH QUESTION"

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Dr. Matthews originally assigned me the task of explaining some aspect of the Welsh national identity to an audience of people in my hometown-- a place where most of the people I've met are unaware that there's a difference between Wales and England. I chose the Welsh language and Trinity people's views of it, with the intention of turning it into a feature article for the local paper. However, it quickly became apparent that I was going to find a lot more material than I could fit into a single article; I kept the feature voice so that it might be able to be split up into a series of articles.

In this study I conducted five interviews (four individuals, one small group) about people's backgrounds and their attitudes toward the Welsh language. Trinity College is officially bilingual and has been for years, so one would expect a greater level of acceptance of/support for the Welsh language; I didn't find anyone who argued in favor of actively exterminating it. However, I met almost every other attitude on the spectrum-- including total apathy.

There were five broad patterns to people's backgrounds: Welsh who speak English only, Welsh who speak English and Welsh, English who speak English only, English who speak English and Welsh, and those whose backgrounds don't have any bearing because they have no opinion for it to affect. Within those categories there are some dramatic contrasts of opinion-- for example, two of the people in the Welsh who speak English only category hold views which are almost diametrically opposed. There are no clearly-defined opinion patterns; although one would expect Welsh-speakers to support the language and English-speakers to oppose it, half of the interviewees fell into categories opposite to the expected views.

While the Welsh language was generally seen as something to be supported in one way or another, there was no common ground on how far that support should go. Nobody agreed with everybody else, and few agreed with most. The debate over the Welsh language continues in Carmarthen and in Wales as a whole, as it has for at least five hundred years.