

Atlantic Isles

Travel and Identity in the
British and Irish West, 1880–1940

Gareth Roddy



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For Ruby Tynan

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Introduction

In 1908, the ornithologist and natural historian W. H. Hudson published an account of his midwinter journey to Land's End, Cornwall:

I blessed the daily furious winds which served to keep the pilgrims away, and to half blot out the vulgar modern buildings with rain and mist from the Atlantic. At dark I would fight my way against the wind to the cliff, and down by the sloping narrow neck of land to the masses of loosely piled rocks at its extremity. It was a very solitary place at that hour, where one feared not to be intruded on by any other wanderer in human shape ... During these vigils, when I was in a sense the 'last man' in that most solitary place, its associations, historical and mythical, exercised a strange power over me. Here, because of its isolation, or remoteness, from Saxon England, because it is the very end of the land, 'the westeste point of the land of Cornewalle', the ancient wild spirit of the people remained longest unchanged, and retained much of its distinctive character down to within recent times. It was a Celtic people with an Iberian strain, even as in Wales and Ireland and Scotland.¹

The west has long gripped the imagination. The ancient Greeks and Romans gazed westwards at what they described as the edge of the land, marked by peripheral coastlines such as Cape Finisterre in Galicia which, like the French department Finistère in western Brittany, derives its name from the Latin *Finis Terræ*, 'end of the earth'. This was a geographical referent, but the west also symbolised the border between the known world and the mystery of what lay beyond it. Much like interest in the far north, which is associated with the mythical Hyperborea and with Pytheas's voyage to Thule, the extreme west inspired speculation, fear and wonder, as well as political allegory as the location of

Plato's Atlantis. The west was also otherworldly, and to gaze westwards at the setting sun was to look towards the Garden of the Hesperides and the Elysian Fields or Isles of the Blessed. In Celtic mythology the otherworld, Tír na nÓg, is also situated in the west, where the Tuatha Dé Danann retreated after their defeat by the Milesians, and where the love story between Oisín and Niamh takes place. Hudson's passage demonstrates that the ancient associations of isolation, mystery and difficult journeys to the end of the earth remained part of the 'strange power' of the British and Irish west at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Atlantic Isles is a book about the idea of the west in modern Ireland and Britain, which came to cultural and political prominence in the late nineteenth century and began to fragment from the 1920s. In this period, the expanding transport network brought places such as Cornwall, Connemara, the Highlands of Scotland, and western Wales into closer contact with the metropolitan centres of the British-Irish Isles. At the same time, a rapidly expanding number of readers and travellers became familiar with western landscapes in written accounts and images, and as tourists. Hudson describes many of the material and cultural characteristics associated with the west, and raises several themes that will be explored in the following chapters. Hudson's 'masses of loosely piled rocks' are the crumbling granite cliffs that situate Cornwall within the ancient geological west, while the 'furious winds' and 'rain and mist' suggest the oceanic climate of the Atlantic edge, in contrast to the more recent geology and continental climate of the south and east. Western landscapes are typically associated with distinctive national territories, but Hudson's transnational description of 'a Celtic people with an Iberian strain' reflects the contemporary understanding of historical, linguistic and racial similarities that connected western places across these isles, and differentiated them from a supposedly 'Anglo-Saxon' east. This powerful combination of ideas formed the foundation of a multinational and deeply historical variety of Britishness that attempted to include Ireland. Going westward was also a means of escaping the beaten track and the degenerative effects of industrialisation and 'vulgar' modernity, but the expansion of the transport network in the nineteenth century brought even the most remote regions within reach for the tourist crowds, which threatened to intrude on Hudson's solitary experience at the cliff edge with all its historical and mythical associations. Beyond the western coastlines, stories about mythical islands and sunken lands 'exercised a strange power' over even the most sceptical of audiences, and re-enchanted a supposedly disenchanted world.

The British and Irish archipelago in historical and literary studies

The significance of the west in British and Irish history has been underappreciated, in part due to the Anglocentric tendencies of 'British' history that predominated into the post-1945 period.² Those tendencies became increasingly conspicuous in the twentieth century, when a series of developments made it more plausible to see the political union of these isles as a temporary condition lasting from around 1800 to 1922, rather than the culmination of an inevitable march towards integration and unity. The borders of the British state and its overseas possessions contracted with the establishment of the Irish Free State (1922) and the Republic of Ireland (1949), and through a process of decolonisation that made the United Kingdom a 'post-imperial state'. From the 1960s the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', the advancement of Scottish and Welsh nationalisms (eventually resulting in political devolution in 1998), and the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities (1973) influenced a generation of historians who, as Raphael Samuel put it, no longer took 'the matter of Britain' for granted.³

There were several responses to this set of circumstances. Tom Nairn predicted the 'break-up of Britain', and Michael Hechter described the integration of the 'Celtic fringe' into the British state as 'internal colonialism'.⁴ From New Zealand, J. G. A. Pocock called for 'pluralist' and 'multicultural' histories that were archipelagic and diasporic, spanning the 'Atlantic archipelago' and the Commonwealth.⁵ It has been noted that most of the historians responding to Pocock's 'plea for a new subject' set aside the diasporic and imperial dimensions and have instead taken up the premise that, as Pocock articulated it:

the various peoples and nations, ethnic cultures, social structures, and locally defined communities, which have from time to time existed in the area known as 'Great Britain and Ireland,' have not only acted so as to create the conditions of their several existences but have also interacted so as to modify the conditions of one another's existence and that there are processes here whose history can and should be studied.⁶

This premise was taken up by early modern historians, who emphasised the interrelated nature of events in the 'three kingdoms' during the mid-seventeenth-century wars and explored the lives of individuals who, as John Morrill put it, 'thought and acted in a way that transcended the limitations of single-nation or single-kingdom history'.⁷ Hugh Kearney's *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations*, first published in 1989, also

demonstrated the potential of the 'four nations' approach as a corrective to Anglocentric histories and to the partition of British and Irish historiographies. In a sweeping account of what he called the 'Britannic melting pot' from 'pre-Roman times to the present', Kearney highlighted connections that crossed national borders and the cultural, political and religious divisions within each nation, and his book has continued to influence more recent attempts to revive 'four nations' history as a methodology for the modern period.⁸

Thinking beyond the confines of the nation also characterises Celticism, or Celtic studies, which traditionally referred to the study of the Celtic peoples and their cultures, literatures, histories, languages and customs. In the 1980s and 1990s, the ancient Celts came under scrutiny as some historians, literary scholars and archaeologists questioned their historical existence and their connections with modern 'Celtic' nations.⁹ Celticism came to be seen by many as a damaging and externally produced set of meanings working in a manner akin to Orientalism, through which the Celtic nations of these isles (Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Wales) were integrated into a political system dominated by England.¹⁰ However, since the 1990s, researchers in Celtic studies have found it more revealing to instead explore the ideas and meanings associated with the Celts, and how they have varied across time and space.¹¹ In any case, it has long been recognised that ideas about the Celts have been internally produced, too, providing material for the articulation of a wide range of identities, including political nationalism, and varieties of cultural nationalism that are compatible with the British state. In recent years, a small but growing body of literature has raised the profile of lower-case pan-Celticism (the often-overlooked transnational networks, cultural connections and shared sense of linguistic, cultural and racial heritage between cultural revivalists in Celtic nations) and the political aims of upper-case Pan-Celticism that gained momentum in the late nineteenth century, even if these movements ultimately remained subordinate to nationalism.¹²

The broad geographical remit of Celtic studies encourages the sort of comparative approach that has been advanced by literary scholars working in the field of Irish and Scottish studies and by those who are engaged in an emergent 'archipelagic criticism' that emphasises 'fluid spatial relations' when exploring the 'literary geography of the archipelago'.¹³ This is a 'plural and connective' way of thinking about Irish and British literature, which draws attention to the non-English influences that shaped the work of Shakespeare and Spenser, and reveals what John Brannigan calls the 'oceanic and archipelagic modes of thought' that emerged from literary modernism in the work of writers such as W. B. Yeats, Louis MacNeice, Edward Thomas and J. M. Synge.¹⁴

Archaeologists have been thinking about oceanic and archipelagic connections for much longer. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Emyr Estyn Evans used the term ‘Atlantic Ends’ to describe the region of environmental, archaeological, economic, social and cultural similarities along the coastal areas of western Europe between Norway and Portugal. Evans also used the term ‘Atlantic Europe’ and borrowed ‘Atlantic Zone’ to emphasise that the western seaways had been undervalued as spaces of ‘culture-diffusion’.¹⁵ This idea was developed by Barry Cunliffe in *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and Its Peoples, 8000 BC to AD 1500* (2001), who argued that the ‘Atlantic façade’ was the place to begin historical analysis, reversing the trajectory of land-based histories and arguing for the Atlantic seaways as ‘an axis of communication’ that, with the shared experience of living at the edge of the continent, produced an ‘oceanic mindset’ and ‘shared common beliefs and values over thousands of years’.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the significance of the west remains less well understood by historians of modern Britain and Ireland. Despite the development of archipelagic thinking outlined above, and with the exception of innovative work such as David Gange’s history-cum-travelogue *The Frayed Atlantic Edge* (2019), historians have typically examined western landscapes within their immediate national territories.¹⁷ Western landscapes are therefore often associated with national identities and (though not always) political separatism, and a vast historiography has demonstrated how, for example, the Gaeltacht regions – Irish-speaking areas of the rural west – were central to the Gaelic League’s spatial imagining of Ireland in the 1890s, and the romanticised Irish west remained the symbolic heart of the nation after the establishment of the Free State.¹⁸ Similarly, in Wales, political nationalism drew inspiration from Y Fro Gymraeg – the areas of the north and west where the Welsh language and culture had survived in the mountains, and Scotland’s north-west was the centre of Highland cultural nationalism, which, alongside Lowland Teutonism, represented the duality of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scottishness.¹⁹ In England, the Cotswolds and Wessex supported an organicist version of Englishness in the interwar period, defined by its ‘Westernness’ against a ‘south-east metropolitan zone’, and Cornwall has also been understood as a place of difference which, with its distinctive national identity, has made it both familiar and yet potentially threatening to English unity.²⁰ There is no doubt that western landscapes shaped, and continue to shape, these national imaginaries. In addition, historians working to build national historiographies have enriched the historical scholarship of these isles over the past half century or so by moving the discipline beyond its traditional Anglocentrism.

Historians have also highlighted the complex relationship between national identities and the state. Following the lead of Roy Foster, historians have identified ‘varieties of Irishness’, some of which were compatible with loyalty to the British monarchy and with participation in the British Empire. This was a fertile middle ground, before the polarising events of the period from around 1912 made it seem barren in retrospect, and made it easier to forget that, for instance, the Irish nationalist politician John Redmond believed there was space for his Catholicism and Irish patriotism alongside loyalty to ‘God, Queen and Country’.²¹ Historians of Scotland such as Graeme Morton, Colin Kidd and Ian Stewart have also identified the multiple levels at which national identity was expressed, and Morton’s term ‘unionist-nationalism’ remains a useful way of highlighting that Scottish and Highland national identity often went hand-in-hand with the union, monarchy and empire.²² In Welsh historiography, Gwyn Alf Williams and Kenneth O. Morgan have shown how a resurgent Welshness in the late nineteenth century was successful because it was able to anchor itself ‘in variant forms of Britishness’,²³ and historians such as David Matless and Paul Readman have broadened our understanding of England’s ‘storied ground’, which could be found in the Scottish Borders, the Welsh Marches, in cities such as Manchester and London, in suburbia and in modernist infrastructure such as the motorway – in other words, in landscapes that are very different to the familiar hedgerows, fields, village greens, church spires and woodlands of the South Country.²⁴

This dynamic has been approached from the opposite direction by historians of Britishness. In his study of political and economic integration, Keith Robbins argued that the ‘blending of “the English”, “the Scots”, and “the Welsh”’ produced the ‘British’ in the nineteenth century, and Linda Colley’s eighteenth-century Britishness was defined by Protestantism, the monarchy, empire and war with France – unifying forces that were superimposed over national identities that continued to be important, resulting in the development of dual identities.²⁵ For David Edgerton, the welfare state and nationalisation marked the transition from an imperial nation to the British nation in the period after 1945.²⁶ In these works and in many others, Britishness is based on the industrialising and integrating economy, participation in the British Empire, and in loyalty to institutions such as the monarchy, and these sentiments are intensified during times of war.²⁷ Britishness, then, is thought to be held together by more recent glues, whereas the cultural, linguistic and ethnic foundations of national identity are generally conceded to Englishness, Scottishness and Welshness.

Given that the historiography of Britishness is concerned with the question of whether, and how, different groups of people came to identify with (or reconcile themselves to) a multinational state, it is striking that Ireland

is often left out of the analysis. S. J. Connolly suggested that historians' approach to the history of the United Kingdom 'should not be overly dominated by the long-term failure to integrate Ireland into a larger political unit'.²⁸ We might instead ask, as Alvin Jackson has done, what made the union of 1800–1922 so durable that it lasted for well over a century.²⁹ In examining a variety of 'Britishness' that attempted to make room for Irishness, this book encounters the limitations of the terminology at hand. In using the term 'Britishness', the intention is not to suggest that Ireland is 'subsumed within Britain'.³⁰ As is discussed in more detail below, the aim is to explore the complex relationship between Irishness and Britishness, and the role of western landscapes in providing metaphors for a pluralistic variety of Britishness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To quote Robbins, who returned to the complexities of Irish and British history in an article on 'British Space', my aim is to do justice 'both to the particularities of Irish history and its place in pan-insular history'.³¹

Atlantic Isles

The present book examines the west as an imagined geography that transcends the national territories of these isles.³² It therefore offers an important contribution to the nationally framed historiographies of western landscapes in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The 'four nations' or 'archipelagic' approach is a necessary methodology for understanding the way contemporaries thought about the western places in Britain and Ireland and the connections between them. Without such an approach, the west fractures into four distinct areas, each enclosed within the borders of national territory in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and its broader significance is difficult to perceive. *Atlantic Isles* demonstrates that a transnational understanding of the western landscapes along the Atlantic seaboard flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. W. H. Hudson's evocative passage at Land's End, with which this introduction began, is representative of a much broader way of thinking about the west as a collection of places that shared certain environmental and cultural characteristics. In the west, geologists uncovered the most ancient layers of rock and ethnologists described the preponderance of older racial 'types'. Philologists also looked westwards for the survival of Celtic languages, while antiquarians and archaeologists marvelled at the increasing density of megalithic monuments towards the Atlantic coastlines. Geographers explained these differences by dividing the British-Irish Isles into a south-eastern lowland area and a north-western upland area, and

writers of popular non-fiction books, including travel writing, popularised the associational values of western landscapes for readers and also for tourists who explored the increasingly accessible west along roads, railways and steamer routes. So powerful was the idea of the west in this period that it constituted what I call a 'westward gaze' in British and Irish culture.³³

Exploring the west in this manner reveals two further insights for historians of modern Britain and Ireland. The first is that western landscapes were especially powerful spaces of modern enchantment. Those who travelled westwards described their journey to the end of the land, and once at the edge they continued to gaze towards the hazy, indistinct horizon. Being at the edge was an affecting experience that re-enchanted the modern world. Historians such as Paul Readman have turned to re-enchantment to explain how the practice of walking in the landscape exercised the historical imagination, and therefore provided 'a sense of connection between the past and the ever-advancing present'.³⁴ In the west, travellers found that sense of connection with the past but they also looked back and articulated their anxieties about the perceived physical, moral and cultural degeneration brought about by urban-industrial and commercial modernity. Furthermore, an additional claim is advanced about the west and 're-enchantment', which builds on the work of literary scholars Joshua Landy and Michael Saler. By their definition, 're-enchantment' describes the deliberate and secular strategies that reimbued the world with a sense of mystery, wonder and purpose in response to both the disenchanting effects of modernity and the beguiling enchantments of modern media and markets.³⁵ At the western edge of the land, re-enchantment was found in folk stories about drowned kingdoms beneath the sea and in tales of mythical islands beyond the horizon. What made this form of enchantment distinctly modern is the role played by geological and archaeological research, which revealed that sea levels had risen, and areas formerly inhabited by humans now lay beneath the water. This research produced a new fascination with stories of sunken lands and elusive islands, which could not be dismissed entirely as fancy. Instead, self-consciously rational and sceptical readers acknowledged that the fantastical stories might be built on a foundation of fact, and this was a source of great wonder. Scientific rationalisation, then, was not simply a force of disenchantment as Max Weber would have it.³⁶ In the west, it was a source of modern enchantment.

Second, this book demonstrates that western landscapes were situated at the centre of a bold attempt to construct a narrative of historical, political and multinational union in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This variety of Britishness accommodated multinational diversity

within the political framework of the United Kingdom, and it attempted to incorporate Ireland in its narrative scope at a time when the subject of Home Rule periodically dominated political debate. The pan-insular historical narratives of Britishness played out on three temporal scales, including geological processes measured by extensive periods of deep time, millennia of racial and linguistic developments indicating westward-moving waves of invasion and settlement, and centuries of historical conflict resolved by political union. As many contemporaries understood it, the west displayed in more concentrated form the ubiquitous ingredients that contributed to the makeup of the Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh nations and of the United Kingdom as a whole. This allowed for the celebration of difference in a way that provided unionists with a resounding means of defusing separatist nationalism, which was typically based on notions of geographical, racial, linguistic, cultural and historical difference. This is not to suggest, however, that national differences were flattened or disappeared. At the same time, this variety of Britishness also offered opportunities for the vigorous assertion of national identity. In other words, the west was so important because it revealed the diverse layers that went into the making of the modern United Kingdom which, so the argument ran, was greater than the sum of its parts.

This insight alters the way we think about the west and about the nature of Britishness. The role of western landscapes in constructing national and separatist identities is well known, but what is less well understood is the attempt to produce a pluralistic version of Britishness that not only included western landscapes but drew strength from contemporaries' perceptions of their expressive differences. Moreover, the fact that this version of Britishness included Ireland, and claimed geological, geographical, racial, linguistic and cultural roots, means that Britishness has taken forms that are both broader and deeper than many historians have hitherto recognised.

Such was the importance of the west in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that we might understand Britain and Ireland in this period as 'Atlantic Isles' – a term that brings together the central claims outlined above and situates them in relation to the historical and literary scholarship in which this book intervenes. 'Atlantic Isles' acknowledges the expansive concept of Atlantic Europe familiar to archaeologists, who have long examined historical connections that cross national boundaries. Moreover, 'Atlantic Isles' suggests that there are important insights to be gained from relocating discussions of the 'Atlantic world' to the British and Irish coastlines which, as literary scholars have recently noted, have not yet been 'properly investigated'.³⁷ As a variation of 'British Isles', 'Atlantic Isles' defines this book's geographical focus on Britain and Ireland

without the former term's implication of British political supremacy, and it evokes the direction of the 'westward gaze' in a way that the more generic term 'archipelago' does not.³⁸ 'Atlantic Isles' also indicates that the west explored in this book is a much broader concept than that implied by Celtic studies. Celtic languages, ethnology, archaeology and mythology were important ingredients, of course, but they formed only part of a more extensive set of ideas about the west which also embraced, for instance, geology, and the pre-Celtic 'Iberian' race. Finally, reaching the end of the land was, and continues to be, an evocative experience for travellers and writers, and this is suggested by David Gange's poetic term *The Frayed Atlantic Edge*.³⁹ 'Atlantic Isles', however, better reflects the argument of this book that apparently peripheral regions were in fact of central importance to some of the most significant cultural and political developments in this period of modern British and Irish history.

Locating the west in time and space

There are, as this introduction has illustrated, a series of material and cultural characteristics associated with the British and Irish west. Nevertheless, the west is geographically vague because there are no boundaries designating its beginning and end. To take just one example, many travellers attached a great deal of significance to landmarks such as the River Tamar, which, it was commonly said, marked the end of England and the beginning of Cornwall, where the atmosphere of the west was immediately felt. But this was by no means a universally accepted threshold, and there are many other places, not least Devon, that are also unquestionably part of England's west. For many other travellers, whether in England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales, the west was instead perceived as an accumulation of feeling marked by gradual changes in the landscape. Equally, the coast by no means marked the termination of the west. Stories of sunken lands, phantom islands and lands of immortality beyond the horizon were an important part of the west's allure, and therefore the west has no clear geographical end point, either. It is important to note, then, that the west is not just a place or a collection of places. It is also an orientation, a direction. This book is interested in exploring the way people thought about the west from afar, how they felt its growing presence and described the embodied experience of travelling westwards, and in the imaginative power of gazing beyond the end of the land towards the horizon.

If the west transcends Britain and Ireland, and has no definable beginning or end, then this poses a practical challenge for the historian.

In addition, sceptics of a transnational approach to British and Irish history have pointed out that attempting to highlight new connections beyond and between the conventional boundaries of historical analysis runs the risk of flattening differences and losing sight of the national context.⁴⁰ Therefore, I have selected four geographical areas of focus, one each within England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, which have been chosen because they exemplify the characteristics associated with the broader west, and they make feasible a detailed comparative examination of western landscapes in Britain and Ireland (see [Figure 0.1](#)). These areas were made accessible by the transport network, and they were traversed by a growing number of visitors who followed in the footsteps of travel writers and journeyed along the routes outlined by guidebooks. Furthermore, the four case studies provide geographical balance and they allow for a flexible structure in the following chapters, which are sometimes organised thematically and at other times consider each area in turn. In this way, exploring the west does not come at the expense of the region or the nation. On the contrary, it offers an opportunity to examine the relationship between regional and national contexts and the transnational British and Irish west. My analysis focuses on, but is not strictly limited to, the areas which follow.

The Isle of Skye was often visited as part of a longer tour of the Western Isles, the Highlands or Scotland, but its island geography, varied landscapes and historical associations meant that the ‘misty isle’ loomed large as a destination in its own right for travellers who journeyed ‘over the sea to Skye’.⁴¹ On board the steamer from Mallaig, the traveller called at Armadale and Isleornsay on the southern Sleat peninsula, and after further stops at the mainland ports of Glenelg, Balmacara and Kyle of Lochalsh, the boat returned to Skye at Kyleakin, Broadford, and the island’s capital, Portree, where travellers customarily disembarked. Skye’s sprawling wing-like peninsulas each had something different to offer the tourist, including the strange rocky landscapes of the Quiraing in the north, scenes of historical conflict between the clans MacLeod and Macdonald on the Vaternish peninsula, and Dunvegan Castle, seat of the MacLeod, to the west. From Broadford to the south, popular excursions brought travellers to the dramatic scenery of Loch Scavaig, Loch Coruisk and the Cuillin mountains, after which the traveller could continue along the steamer route towards Stornoway and the Outer Hebrides or return to the mainland by Kyle of Lochalsh.

Also demarcated by water is the second area, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, which is bounded by the Tamar in the north-east and elsewhere by the Atlantic Ocean. Travellers who crossed the Tamar were chiefly interested in the coast and the far west, following the recommended guidebook

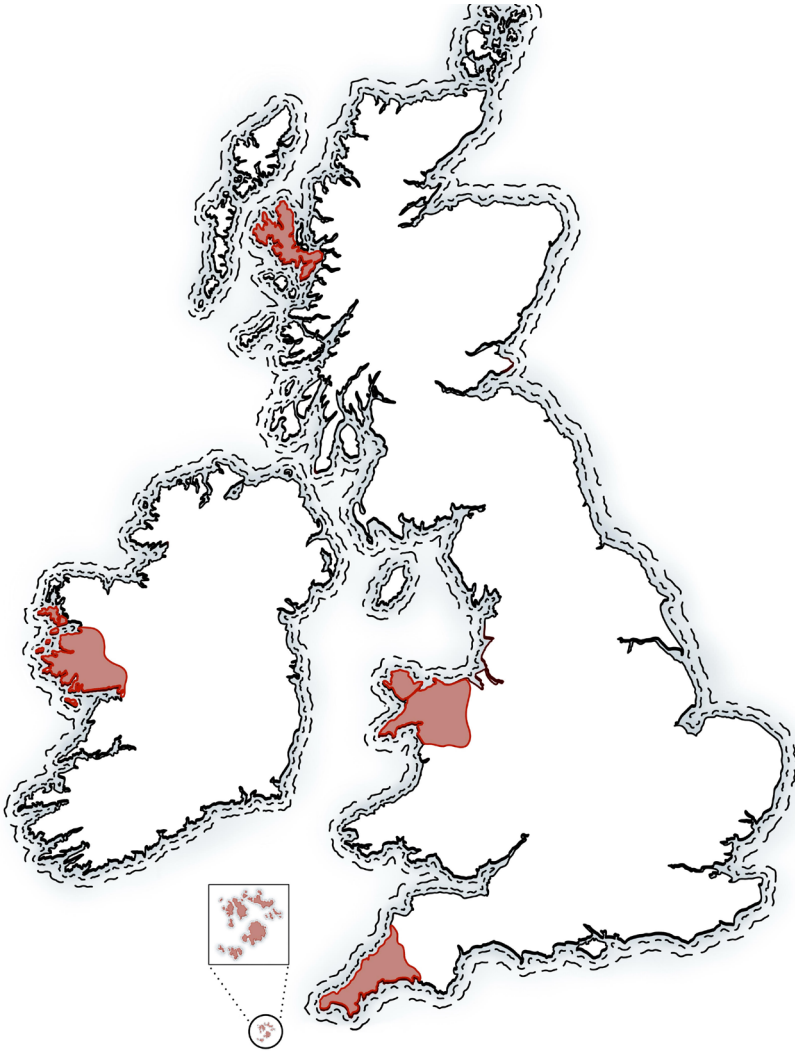


Figure 0.1 Atlantic Isles: the west in four case study areas.

route through Truro and Falmouth along the south coast to the Lizard Peninsula and Land's End. Here, travellers wondered at stone circles and cromlechs, ancient forts such as Treryn Dinas, and dramatic cliffscapes that crumbled into the Atlantic in an 'eternal wildness of granite and waves', as the travel writer H. V. Morton put it.⁴² From Penzance, day trippers boarded the S.S. *Lyonesse* for the Scilly Isles, and colonies of artists gathered in Newlyn and St Ives. Returning home by the rugged northern coast (like Daniel Defoe), more dramatic cliff scenery and associations with

Arthurian legends made Tintagel the place where, one guidebook claimed, the ‘weird enchantment of the scenery of North Cornwall can be fully realised’.⁴³

Unlike Skye or Cornwall, the Irish case study is an area in the west of Connacht that does not coincide with recognisable historical or natural boundaries; it is an area made coherent and convenient by the tourism industry. From Dublin, the Midland Great Western Railway crossed Ireland and arrived in Galway city, the entrance to the region. From Galway, the guidebooks recommended excursions by boat through Lough Corrib to Cong in the north and to the Aran Islands in Galway Bay where, on Inis Mór, the visitor could walk around Dún Aonghasa and recall the adventures of Fírbolg heroes amidst the prehistoric cliff-edge fortress. The tourist’s itinerary proceeded westwards from Galway by long car (or, from 1895, by train) through Connemara to Clifden, past the quartzite summits of the Maamturks and the Twelve Bens. Then, the traveller went north through Kylemore and the mountainous landscape of Mweelrea and Croagh Patrick, and on to Westport overlooking Clew Bay. Before returning to Dublin from Westport by the Midland Great Western Railway branch line, the guidebooks recommended an excursion to Achill Island to see the Croaghnaun Cliffs, and this trip was included in the ‘Connemara and Achill’ tourist ticket, which also covered travel from the principal towns in England and Scotland, steamers in Galway Bay and Lough Corrib, and cars between Clifden and Westport.⁴⁴

Similarly, the Welsh case study is a tourist region of north-west Wales that travellers typically approached from Chester. Passengers on the London and North Western Railway passed seaside towns such as Colwyn Bay and Llandudno before heading towards Bangor, Caernarfon and the quieter Llŷn Peninsula, which lay beyond the reach of the railway. Along the way, inland excursions took anglers and artists through the Conwy Valley and into the mountains towards the picturesque waterfalls and wooded Fairy Glen at Betws-y-Coed.⁴⁵ Further west, the road inland from Bangor took the hiking tourist through Nant Ffrancon, ‘an amphitheatre of ... jagged splintered rocks’, to Llyn Ogwen and Llyn Idwal, where they might embark on an ascent of the peaks of the Carneddau and the Glyderau.⁴⁶ From Caernarfon, after visiting the Norman castle that in 1911 hosted the revived Investiture of the Prince of Wales ceremony, a popular excursion to Llanberis took tourists to the foot of Yr Wyddfa, which from 1896 could be ascended from the comfort of a mountain railway carriage.⁴⁷ Following the railway line south through Criccieth to tourist centres at Harlech and Barmouth, many suggested tourist routes returned eastwards, and passed through Bala and Llangollen before exiting Wales for Shrewsbury.

These areas of the west were also part of other, overlapping imagined geographies from locality to region, nation and beyond. Cornwall, for example, is part of the West Country region, and the Norse-Gaelic history of Skye makes it a place where the west overlaps with the 'old north'.⁴⁸ It is also worth reiterating that the boundaries of these four case studies are porous; they are situated within a broader west, and they aid its analysis in a British-Irish context by providing areas of focus. Other areas might have been chosen. This means there are many other germane places within Britain and Ireland that lie outside the scope of this book. For instance, it was when analysing visual and literary representations of Shropshire and the England-Wales border that I first noticed the 'westward gaze'.⁴⁹ The Isle of Man, regrettably, is mentioned only a couple of times in this book. Cumbria, primarily thought of as an inland 'Lake District', is also, as Andrew Gibson has shown, part of England's 'Atlantic edge'.⁵⁰ A Donegal case study might present a more complicated picture of the post-partition Irish west, given its proximity to Northern Ireland and its relative remoteness from the Free State. The west also extends beyond these isles, and this book's conclusion discusses Brittany's analogous experience of infrastructural development and the changing relationship with the centralising French state, travellers' descriptions of going westwards to a rugged, wild Atlantic periphery, the enchanting power of stories about sunken lands such as Kêr-Is, and discussions about race, degeneration and anxieties about modernity. Far from being the final word, it is hoped that this book will inspire further research on western places and the connections between them.

The chronological parameters of this book (1880–1940) are also narrower than the interest in western places, which predates 1880 and extends beyond 1940. From the sixteenth century, 'linguistic antiquarianism' looked westwards for evidence of Celtic language survival, and from the mid-eighteenth century antiquarians translated the surviving manuscripts of Irish mythology.⁵¹ At the same time, James Macpherson's influential *Ossian* poems – purportedly collected in the Scottish Highlands – caused controversy at home and inspired nationalism in Europe, and as the Home Tour grew in popularity travellers such as Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, William Gilpin and Thomas Pennant were drawn to the upland landscapes of Scotland and Wales. From the mid-nineteenth century, readers were drawn westwards by English travel accounts such as Wilkie Collins's *Rambles Beyond Railways* (1851) and Walter White's *A Londoner's Walk to the Land's End* (1855), as well as Charles Kingsley's historical novel *Westward Ho!* (1855). In Ireland, the Aran Islands were among the places explored by influential antiquarians such as George Petrie, Samuel Ferguson and William Wilde, and scholars such as Ernest

Renan and Matthew Arnold considered how French and British national character might be shaped by the landscapes, languages, races and cultures of the Celtic west.⁵²

Nevertheless, there are good reasons for beginning the analysis in the 1880s. By this time, the expansion of the British and Irish transport network connected the once remote places of the west with the metropolitan centres of these isles. No longer so distant and strange, the west was more accessible to tourists and was made familiar in a literary culture that described western places to a growing reading public. These developments expanded the geographical horizons of the nationally imagined communities in these isles, and in the 1880s discussions about the relationship between nationality and autonomy intensified as the Home Rule debates came to dominate British and Irish politics. In the final decades of the nineteenth century there was also an intensification of the transformations associated with the British and Irish experience of modernity. Rapid change was experienced through new technologies of communication and travel, suburbanisation threatened the rural countryside and urban areas were haunted by the spectre of degeneration. A sense of bewilderment, disorientation and dislocation from the past also motivated the search for re-enchantment in a supposedly disenchanted modernity.⁵³ In this context, the west became important in new ways.

The book's endpoint is in 1940, but the political significance of the west began to break down earlier than that. The west remains a place of enchantment, but the connection between western Ireland and a multinational, pan-insular variety of Britishness was broken after the Irish War of Independence (1919–21) and the establishment of Saorstát Éireann, the Irish Free State (1922). In Britain, the rise of the Labour Party accompanied a shift towards a more overtly class-based politics in the interwar years, and this period also saw the development of the planner-preservationist mindset that rose to political and cultural power after the Second World War.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in the post-1945 period the welfare state and nationalisation marked the transition from an imperial nation to a 'British nation', and British identity looked to the Second World War as the 'mythic moment of national becoming'.⁵⁵

The arguments in this book are substantiated through an examination of textual and visual representations of western landscapes, including books, pamphlets, articles, maps, photographs, advertisements, paintings and poster artwork. Among the texts are works of academic geology, philology, ethnology, history, geography, archaeology, folklore, literature, sociology, as well as popular works and articles in the popular press. In these materials, ideas about western landscapes are articulated by a multitude of voices, and the west 'migrates through regimes of value'. Western

landscapes, like all landscapes, are a tangle of nature and culture; terrain that is 'simultaneously a site of economic, social, political, and aesthetic value', of cultural authority, memory, history and individual identity.⁵⁶ At the centre of these materials is an extensive collection of what can loosely be described as travel writing, where many voices and regimes of value came together.

Travel writing is one label among many denoting a diverse and rich literary culture that has been otherwise described using terms such as travel memoir, travel book, guidebook, travel story, travelogue and travel literature, which illustrate the range of characteristics that literary critics and historians have emphasised when dealing with texts that describe movement through space.⁵⁷ Traditionally, this genre was subdivided into guidebooks and personal travel narratives, which reflected the view that the systematic guidebook was, as Roland Barthes put it in a well-known essay on the *Guide Bleu*, a degenerate, commercial, prosaic and superficial agent of blindness in contrast to erudite, artful and literary travel writing.⁵⁸ The guidebook emerged in the 1830s and 1840s, when series such as *Murray's Handbooks*, *Black's Guides* and Thomas Cook's *Traveller's Handbooks* compiled maps and illustrations, suggested itineraries and provided practical information about hotels, bathing facilities, railway services, guides and excursions, leading the reader through the landscape with an authoritative tone that combined historical information with literary references. They were frequently amended with corrections and updated with new information in subsequent editions, and they met the growing demand of an expanding tourist market.⁵⁹ The difference between literary travel writing and the guidebook was, for Barthes and many others, analogous to the difference between the traveller and the tourist. Tourists, so the accusation went, were reliant on the guidebook for information and an itinerary which, along with an all-inclusive ticket, eased them into a period of passive consumption. In contrast, travellers possessed the knowledge, sensitivity and spirit of adventure to step away from the 'beaten track', avoid the crowded watering places listed in the guidebooks, and achieve an authentic experience that cultivated insight and enlightenment.⁶⁰

In recent decades, however, historians of tourism have shown that the dichotomy between the tourist and traveller, the guidebook and literary travel writing, is misleading and the lines between them are blurred.⁶¹ Nineteenth- and twentieth-century guidebooks were varied in their contents, combining train timetables and lists of steamer fares with extensive introductory treatises on history and geology, and 'evocative narratives of place' traditionally associated with the literary travel book.⁶² For instance, in its guidebook *The Royal Route* (1938), the David Brayne

steamer company found space among the tables of prices and itineraries for suggestive descriptions of Skye's 'elfin shadows' and the 'savage faces' of its 'stark peaks'.⁶³ Moreover, travel writers moved seamlessly between the trope of the holiday and polemical commentary, between humorous anecdotes and treatises on historical or racial development, and between practical information and excerpts from well-known works by Wordsworth, Tennyson or Scott. Their descriptions of place could also become as repetitive and as formulaic as the contents of any guidebook. In recognition of this fluidity, I use the term 'guidebooks' to refer to systematic texts such as *Murray's* and *Black's*, and otherwise use terms such as travel literature and travel writing interchangeably to indicate texts that describe journeys to western regions.

The authors of these texts were predominantly middle-class, Anglophone men and women. Some of them were from the western areas they described in their travel books while others visited as outsiders. It has been suggested that women's travel writing is characterised by a 'less authoritarian stance' that foregrounds personal relationships and the complexities of everyday life, in contrast to the 'public discourse' and 'imperialist voice' more commonly adopted by men.⁶⁴ Chapter 4 examines gendered descriptions of dangerous mountain landscapes and young women who were gazed upon as embodiments of archetypal beauty, but travel, by removing people from everyday life, also presented opportunities for expectations of all kinds to be subverted. Dora Benson advised her male readers on which routes through the mountains might be too dangerous for them, and Ann C. Colley has shown that the figure of the adventurous mountaineer was more accessible to Victorian women than has been previously thought.⁶⁵ Many male writers subverted the image of the explorer-hero for comic effect, and women also performed an imperial gaze on their journeys through the west, where their interactions with local guides were shaped by class as much as by gender. Broader changes in the form, such as the eclipse of the realist, instructive 'heroic adventure' and the growing use of dialogue, are observable in the travel writing of both men and women.⁶⁶ The sheer number of texts under consideration reveals the west as a widespread imagined geography that was connected to broader ideas about national identity, modernity and enchantment. In the following chapters the background of these authors is, at times, discussed. However, this book's cultural approach to the history of landscape places less emphasis on the very detailed exploration of individuals associated with 'landscape biography'.⁶⁷

By the late nineteenth century, a mass reading public purchased guidebooks that were frequently updated in new editions, and personal accounts of travel sold well and resurfaced in a dynamic second-hand

market and in public libraries.⁶⁸ Beyond their popularity, guidebooks and travel writing are particularly profuse as historical sources because of the way in which their authors and compilers voraciously embraced the wider culture, and their value has not always been recognised by historians. In his article on guidebook representations of London, David Gilbert emphasised the importance of guidebooks in shaping popular understandings of places and cultures.⁶⁹ This can be applied to travel writing in general, which combined the wide range of interests that characterise early nineteenth-century antiquarian writing with the desire to produce comprehensive, detailed and accurate surveys that catered for travellers and general readers alike.⁷⁰ These texts shaped the experiences of travellers who repeated information from guidebooks in handwritten diaries,⁷¹ and influenced the thoughts of those who, rather than physically follow in the footsteps of the travel writer, preferred to, as the literary scholar R. A. Scott-James put it in *An Englishman in Ireland* (1910), ‘indulge the wild spirit of adventure’ from the comfort of the fireside armchair.⁷²

The travel book was, to use Jonathan Raban’s memorable phrase, ‘a notoriously raffish open house’.⁷³ These texts drew on older, canonical travel accounts while reaching out greedily to other genres and compiling, filtering and reproducing information for popular audiences.⁷⁴ Tales collected by folklorists were retold; dramatic accounts of adventure were illustrated by photographs, maps and advertisements; encounters with local people were described in a novelistic style of writing; travel timetables and lists of hotel charges found their place alongside extracts from famous poems and novels; and lengthy introductions provided political and economic observations, and summarised the theories of influential historians, geologists, geographers and archaeologists.⁷⁵ In their complexity and variety, travel books are an especially rich resource for illuminating the imagined geography of the west and its many regimes of value, and by examining their intertextuality it is possible to trace the movement and mutation of ideas as they were repackaged for different readerships.⁷⁶

Infrastructure, enchantment, performance, identity

There are seven chapters after this introduction, followed by a conclusion that reflects on the book’s arguments and suggests areas for further work. In [Part I](#), ‘Infrastructure’, the first chapter examines the transformations that brought the west into closer connection with the metropolitan centres of Britain and Ireland in the nineteenth century. This was a result of the expanding infrastructure of railways, steamer routes and roads, and the growth of the modern tourism industry. These developments are

situated within broader nineteenth-century processes, in which European and North American nation states reached out towards their respective peripheries and drew them into expanding networks of national infrastructure. Drawing on travel literature, railway timetables, maps, advertisements and poster artwork, this chapter demonstrates how the west was transformed from a remote periphery to a holiday destination. In addition to infrastructural integration, these developments made it possible for the western peripheries to be imagined as part of a wider sense of Britishness, which is discussed in more detail in the final two chapters of the book.

Part II, ‘Enchantment’, introduces the ‘westward gaze’ through an exploration of the highly stylised descriptions of travelling westward. After physically or imaginatively gazing westwards in the direction of their destination from afar, travel writers described the journey as a departure from anglicised areas of the British-Irish Isles and highlighted the changes in the landscape that marked the transition. Finally, travellers and writers gazed towards the hazy, indistinct horizon from the western edges of the land. Once they had reached the edge, their thoughts turned to Hy Brasil and Tír na nÓg, two ‘elusive islands’ that are the subject of [Chapter 2](#), and [Chapter 3](#) focuses on the ‘sunken lands’ Cantre’r Gwaelod and Lyonesse. The chapters in this section argue that the west was a space of modern enchantment.

In **Part III**, ‘Performance’, [Chapter 4](#) considers western landscapes as the setting for a series of performances, which involved escaping the beaten track, engaging the historical imagination, experiencing and overcoming danger and misadventure, and encountering a host of local characters. For many travellers and writers, journeying to the west was an opportunity for individual self-fashioning, where identities were inscribed in space. [Chapter 5](#) considers how, as well as gazing westwards and describing their experiences at the edge, travellers also turned their gaze back towards home as they articulated responses to the rapid, destabilising and often bewildering transformations associated with industrial and urban modernity.

The final two chapters, in **Part IV**, ‘Identity’, explore how the west played an important and under-appreciated role in the way contemporaries understood the layered historical development of the United Kingdom in the years before the partition of Ireland. The Irish language articulates this idea in the word *siar*, which means to turn westwards and also to look backwards in time or space.⁷⁷ [Chapter 6](#) focuses on the deeper layers of geology and race, arguing that geology provided a framework for understanding the foundational place of the west in the development of these isles, which could also be seen in the predominant ‘Celtic’ and ‘Iberian’

racial layers. [Chapter 7](#) explores how the west became important to a multinational variety of Britishness, which was articulated through the unique contributions of western peoples and racial groups to a 'British' national character. This chapter moves the discussion on from the millennia of racial and linguistic developments to the centuries of historical events, to explore how western locales were recast as microcosms of the story of the United Kingdom. These were teleological narratives that attempted to describe years of war, resistance and struggle followed by mutually beneficial political union.

Notes

1. W. H. Hudson, *The Land's End: A Naturalist's Impressions in West Cornwall* (New York, 1908), 58–60.
2. D. Cannadine, 'British History as a "New Subject": Politics, Perspectives and Prospects', in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (London, 1995), 12–28.
3. R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. 2: *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London, 1998), 21–40, quotation at 37.
4. T. Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-liberalism*, 2nd edn (London, 1981); M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (London, 1975).
5. J. G. A. Pocock, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject', *The Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 4 (1975): 601–21; R. Bourke, 'Pocock and the Presuppositions of the New British History', *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 3 (2010), 747–70; D. Armitage, 'Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?', *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (1999), 427–45.
6. J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Limits and Divisions of British History: In Search of an Unknown Subject', *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 2 (1982), 311–36, at 317.
7. Quoted in M. Coolahan, 'Whither the Archipelago? Stops, Starts, and Hurdles on the Four Nations Front', *Literature Compass* 15, no. 11 (2018), 1–12.
8. H. Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2006); N. Lloyd-Jones and M. Scull, eds, *Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History: A (dis)United Kingdom?* (London, 2018).
9. M. Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (Basingstoke, 1992); M. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester, 1999).
10. The connection between Celticism and Orientalism is discussed in W. J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History* (Oxford, 1985); J. Leerssen, 'Celticism', in *Celticism*, ed. T. Brown (Amsterdam, 1996), 1–20.
11. Leerssen, 'Celticism', 3–4.
12. D. G. Williams, 'Celticism', in *Late Victorian into Modern*, ed. L. Marcus, M. Mendelssohn, K. Shepherd-Barr (Oxford, 2016), 69–82; D. G. Williams, 'Another Lost Cause? Pan-Celticism, Race and Language', *Irish Studies Review* 17, no. 1 (2009), 89–101; I. Stewart, 'Celticism and the Four Nations in the Long Nineteenth Century', in *Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History: A (dis)United Kingdom?*, eds. N. Lloyd-Jones and M. Scull (London, 2018), 135–59; P. O'Leary, '"Children of the Same Mother": Gaelic Relations with the Other Celtic Revival Movements,

1882–1916’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 6 (1986), 101–30. At the time of writing, I. Stewart’s *The Celts* (Princeton, NJ, 2025) has not yet been published, though it will offer a detailed exploration of pan- and Pan-Celticism.

13. N. Allen, N. Groom and J. Smith, eds, *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge* (Oxford, 2017), quotations from the introduction; J. Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History, and Politics, 1603–1707* (Oxford, 2008); R. A. Barlow, *Modern Irish and Scottish Literature: Connections, Contrasts, Celticisms* (Oxford, 2023); N. Allen, *Ireland, Literature, and the Coast* (Oxford, 2021).

14. J. Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles* (Edinburgh, 2014), 6–7; J. Brannigan, “‘Part of the Nature of Things’: Towards an Archipelagic and Maritime History of Literary Modernism”, *Yearbook of English Studies* 50 (2020), 81–94, at 82.

15. E. E. Evans, ‘The Atlantic Ends of Europe’, *Advancement of Science* 15 (1958), 54–64; E. E. Evans, ‘Ireland and Atlantic Europe’, *Geographische Zeitschrift* 52, no. 3 (1964), 224–41.

16. B. Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and Its Peoples, 8000 BC to AD 1500* (Oxford, 2001), vii, 6–18, 554, 565. Cunliffe acknowledged the earlier proponents of the ‘Atlantic seaways’ idea, including O. G. S. Crawford, ‘The Distribution of Early Bronze Age Settlements in Britain’, *Geographical Journal* (1912); O. G. S. Crawford, ‘The Western Seaways’, in *Custom Is King: Studies in Honour of R. R. Marett*, ed. L. H. Dudley Buxton (London, 1936), 181–200; H. J. Fleure and E. J. Roberts, ‘Archaeological Problems of the West Coast of Britain’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 70 (1915), 405–20; H. J. Fleure and H. Peake, *The Way of the Sea* (New Haven, CT, 1929); E. T. Leeds and C. Fox, *The Personality of Britain* (Cardiff, 1932); E. G. Bowen, *Saints, Seaways and Settlement in the Celtic Lands* (Cardiff, 1969); E. G. Bowen, *Britain and the Western Seaways* (London, 1972).

17. D. Gange, *The Frayed Atlantic Edge: A Historian’s Journey from Shetland to the Channel* (London, 2019).

18. This is a vast literature, and just a handful of examples are given here: A. Beatty, ‘The Gaelic League and the Spatial Logics of Irish Nationalism’, *Irish Historical Studies* 43, no. 163 (2019), 55–72; J. W. Foster, ‘Certain Set Apart: The Western Island in the Irish Renaissance’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 66, no. 264 (1977), 261–74; D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); P. Sheeran, ‘The Idiocy of Irish Rural Life Reviewed’, *The Irish Review* 5 (1988), 27–33.

19. P. Gruffudd, ‘Remaking Wales: Nation-building and the Geographical Imagination, 1925–50’, *Political Geography* 14, no. 3 (1995), 219–39; C. Kidd, ‘Teutonic Ethnology and Scottish Nationalist Inhibition’, 1780–1880’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 74, no. 197 (1995), 45–68; C. Harvie, ‘Anglo-Saxons into Celts: The Scottish Intellectuals 1760–1930’, in *Celticism*, ed. T. Brown (Amsterdam, 1996), 231–56.

20. D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), 15–18, 129–30; S. Trower, *Rocks of Nation: The Imagination of Celtic Cornwall* (Manchester, 2015).

21. J. McConnel, ‘John Redmond and Irish Catholic Loyalty’, *The English Historical Review* 125, no. 512 (2010), 83–111, quotation at 110; R. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English history* (London, 1993), chapter 2; C. Reid, *The Lost World of Stephen Gwynn: Irish Constitutionalism and Cultural Politics, 1864–1950* (Manchester, 2011). For identity and the state in independent Ireland, see I. Milne and I. D’Alton, eds, *Protestant and Irish: The Minority’s Search for a Place in Independent Ireland* (Cork, 2019).

22. C. Kidd, ‘Race, Empire, and the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Nationhood’, *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 4 (2003), 873–92, at 876; Graeme Morton,

Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830–1860 (East Linton, 1999); J. M. Mackenzie and T. Devine, eds, *Scotland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2011); I. Stewart, 'Of Crofters, Celts and Claymores: The *Celtic Magazine* and the Highland Cultural Nationalist Movement, 1875–88', *Historical Research* 89, no. 243 (2016), 88–113.

23. G. Williams, *The Welsh in Their History* (London, 1982), p. 194; K. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880–1980* (Oxford, 1981).

24. P. Readman, *Storied Ground: Landscape and the Shaping of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2019); D. Matless, *About England* (London, 2023). For the South Country, see A. Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', in *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880–1920*, ed. R. Colls and P. Dodd (London, 2014 [1986]), 85–111.

25. K. Robbins, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: Integration and Diversity* (Oxford, 1988), quotation at 2; L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT, 2014 [1992]). In contrast, it has been suggested that English identity was so closely tied to the British Empire that an English cultural identity did not develop until after 1880: K. Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003).

26. D. Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-Century History* (London, 2018).

27. Also see R. Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940–2000* (London, 2002); R. Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002); P. Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London, 2004).

28. S. J. Connolly, 'Introduction', in *Kingdoms United? Great Britain and Ireland Since 1500*, ed. S. J. Connolly (Dublin, 1999), 9–12, at 12.

29. A. Jackson, *The Two Unions: Ireland, Scotland, and the Survival of the United Kingdom, 1707–2007* (Oxford, 2012).

30. The limitations of the available terminology are discussed in A. Grant and K. J. Stringer, 'Introduction: The Enigma of British History', in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (London, 1995), 3–11, at 5 n4.

31. K. Robbins, 'The "British Space": World-Empire-Continent-Nation-Region-Locality: A Historiographical Problem', *History Compass* 7, no. 1 (2009), 66–94, at 80.

32. 'Imagined' or 'imaginative' geography is a term associated with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978). Here I use the term in a general sense to denote the west as a collection of ideas that were articulated by 'insiders' who claimed the west as their own, as well as 'outsiders' extending a colonial imagination.

33. This is an expansion of the idea of the 'westward gaze', which I first articulated in an article about the literature of Shropshire: G. Roddy, "'Westward on the High-Hilled Plains": The Literature of Shropshire and the Early Twentieth Century Imagination, 1896–c.1939', *Contemporary British History* 33, no. 1 (2019), 28–51, at 38–9. For a theoretical discussion of the tourist gaze, see J. Urry and J. Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze* 3.0, 3rd edn (London, 2011), chapter 1.

34. P. Readman, 'Walking, and Knowing the Past: Antiquaries, Pedestrianism and Historical Practice in Modern Britain', *History* 107, no. 374 (2021), 51–73, at 62–3.

35. J. Landy and M. Saler, 'Introduction: The Varieties of Modern Enchantment', in *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, ed. J. Landy and M. Saler (Stanford, CA, 2009), 1–14.

36. M. Weber, 'Science as a Vocation' (1918), in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (London, 2009), 129–56.

37. Allen, Groom and Smith, *Coastal Works*, introduction.

38. The term 'Atlantic Isles' has also been used as a politically neutral description in, for example, D. MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London, 2010), 333. The term 'British Isles' is discussed in Grant and Stringer, 'Introduction', 5.
39. Gange, *Frayed Atlantic Edge*.
40. L. Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992), 309–29.
41. A lyric from *The Skye Boat Song*, the name of a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson (1892), and quoted in various publications including J. A. MacCulloch, *The Misty Isle of Skye*, 3rd edn (Stirling, 1927 [1905]), 49, 269–70; D. MacKinnon, *How to See Skye* (Portree, 1937), 14, 90; K. MacRae, *Handbook and Guide to the 'Misty Isle' of Skye* (Portree, 1921), 57.
42. H. V. Morton, *In Search of England*, 13th edn (London, 1931 [1927]), 93.
43. The Great Western Railway, *The Cornish Riviera*, 2nd edn (London, 1905), 78–80.
44. J. Cooke, ed., *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, 7th edn (London, 1906), advertiser, 4.
45. H. Jenkinson, *Jenkinson's Practical Guide to North Wales* (London, 1878), cxii–cxi; G. Eyre-Todd, ed., *Through England and Scotland by the West Coast Royal Mail Route* (London, 1903), 75, 81.
46. Quotation from M. J. B. Baddeley and C. S. Ward, eds, *Thorough Guide, North Wales (Part I)*, 3rd edn (London, 1889), 102.
47. Eyre-Todd, *Through England and Scotland* (1903), 86–8. Yr Wyddfa is also known as Snowdon.
48. A. Byrne, 'Imagining the Celtic North: Science and Romanticism on the Fringes of Britain', in *Imagining the Supernatural North*, ed. E. Barraclough, D. Cudmore, S. Donecker (Edmonton, 2016), 131–48; P. Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London, 2005).
49. Roddy, 'Literature of Shropshire', 38–9.
50. A. Gibson, "'At the Dying Atlantic's Edge": Norman Nicholson and the Cumbrian Coast', in *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*, ed. N. Allen, N. Groom, J. Smith, eds, (Oxford, 2017), 77–92.
51. I. Stewart, 'The Mother Tongue: Historical Study of the Celts and Their Language(s) in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland', *Past and Present* 243, no. 1 (2019), 71–107.
52. T. Robinson, *Stones of Aran: Labyrinth* (London, 1997 [1995]), 122.
53. S. Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space* (Cambridge, MA, 1983); M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1983); M. Daunt and B. Rieger, eds, *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford, 2001).
54. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 239–357.
55. Edgerton, *Rise and Fall*, xx–xxi; P. Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York, 2005), 87–95.
56. Quotations from Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 28–30; also see D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, eds, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge, 1988); S. Daniels, 'Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape', in *New Models in Geography*, ed. R. Peet and N. Thrift (London, 1989), vol. 2, 196–220.
57. For instance, Paul Fussell defined travel books as a 'sub-species of memoir' in *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars* (New York, 1980), 203. Jan Borm used the term 'travel literature' to emphasise 'the literary at work in travel writing' in

'Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. G. Hooper and T. Youngs (Abingdon, 2004), 13–26, at 13–15. For a summary of some theoretical approaches to travel writing, see M. B. Campbell, 'Travel Writing and Its Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. P. Hulme and T. Youngs (Cambridge, 2002), 261–78.

58. R. Barthes, 'The Blue Guide', in *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers (London, 2000), 74–7, at 76. This is also discussed in D. Gilbert, '"London In All Its Glory – Or How to Enjoy London": Guidebook Representations of Imperial London', *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no. 3 (1999), 279–97, at 281–2; R. Koshar, '"What Ought To Be Seen": Tourists' Guidebooks and National Identities in Germany and Europe', *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 3 (1998), 323–40, at 324.

59. Gilbert, 'Guidebook Representations', 283; Koshar, 'Tourists' Guidebooks and National Identities', 323; J. Palmowski, 'Travels with Baedeker: The Guidebook and the Middle Classes in Victorian and Edwardian Britain'. In *Histories of Leisure*, ed. R. Koshar (Oxford, 2002), 105–30; D. M. Bruce, 'Baedeker: The Perceived "Inventor" of the Formal Guidebook – A Bible for Travellers in the 19th Century', in *Giants of Tourism*, ed. R. W. Butler and R. A. Russell (Cambridge MA, 2010), 93–110.

60. J. Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800–1918* (Oxford, 1993), 4–6; Gilbert, 'Guidebook Representations', 282.

61. Gilbert, 'Guidebook Representations', 283; K. J. James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape in Ireland: The Commodification of Culture* (New York, 2014), 11, 13.

62. James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*, 14.

63. For the description, see David MacBrayne, *The Royal Route. The Isles of Youth. See This Scotland First* (Glasgow, 1938), 19, and from 41.

64. Discussed in S. Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London, 1991) 3, 21–22; S. Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. P. Hulme and T. Youngs (Cambridge, 2002), 225–41.

65. A. C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime* (London, 2010), see chapter 3.

66. H. Carr, 'Modernism and Travel (1880–1940)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. P. Hulme and T. Youngs (Cambridge, 2002), 70–86, at 75; Mills, *Discourses of Difference*; Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender'.

67. J. Burchardt, *Lifescapes: The Experience of Landscape in Britain, 1870–1960* (Cambridge, 2024).

68. For a description of the second-hand market, see W. H. Hudson, *Afoot in England* (London, 1909), 1–2. For an example of a bibliography of travel books compiled by the librarians C. H. Hunt and W. T. Montgomery, see Bootle Public Library, *Where Shall I Spend My Holidays?* (Liverpool, 1906).

69. Gilbert, 'Guidebook Representations', 280–81.

70. M. Kelly, *Quartz and Feldspar: Dartmoor: A British Landscape in Modern Times* (London, 2016), 24–32.

71. For example, see *A Small Manuscript Notebook Diary Containing Details of a Visit to Ireland in 1905; 25 August–15 September 1905*, National Library of Ireland, MS 49,503.

72. R. A. Scott-James, *An Englishman in Ireland* (London, 1910), 3.

73. J. Raban, *For Love and Money: Writing, Reading, Travelling 1968–1987* (London, 1988), 253.

74. Some oft-quoted examples of travel writing in the west include T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides*, 1772 (Chester, 1774); S. Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (London, 1775); A. Smith, *A Summer in Skye* (London, 1865); G. Borrow, *Wild Wales* (London, 1862); W. Collins, *Rambles Beyond Railways* (England, 1851); W. White, *A Londoner's Walk to the Land's End and a Trip to the Scilly Isles* (London, 1855).
75. Academics often wrote travel books or contributed to guidebooks. For example, the geographer H. J. Fleure wrote an introductory article, 'The Land of Wales', in *The Blue Guides: Wales*, ed. F. Muirhead (London, 1922), xi–xxvi.
76. J. Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), 2–5.
77. T. Robinson *Connemara: A Little Gaelic Kingdom* (London, 2012 [2011]), 380.

Part I

INFRASTRUCTURE

Chapter 1

Infrastructure and tourism in the west

Until the mid-nineteenth century, those who could afford it travelled around the west by horse and cart, sought passage on fishing boats, and made use of the few railway lines and steamboat services that had been already established. To undertake journeys to the remote periphery, travellers often spent significant periods of time away from home and work, and as a result they were few in number and privileged in social status. Aside from a handful of established seaside resorts on the north Wales coast, these early tourists often found themselves well off the beaten track. For much of the nineteenth century, it was often said that ‘more Englishmen had visited Paris’ than the Cornish town of Truro, and that it was ‘easier to get to Jerusalem than to Skye’.¹ This chapter examines the infrastructural developments that had taken place by the late nineteenth century in the western peripheries of Britain and Ireland. The expansion of transport networks connected once remote places to the metropolitan centres of these isles in new ways, and this process was closely linked to the growth of the modern tourism industry. With each passing year, the maps of the west were increasingly inked with stretching, thickening and multiplying lines of rail, coach and steamer routes that were timetabled and coordinated. By the 1930s, journeys that had been previously calculated in days were instead counted in hours. Transport was swifter, cheaper and more reliable; railway stations were knitted together by motorbuses, motorcars and bicycles on repaired and rebuilt roads; and travellers purchased tickets for circular tours and stayed in hotels, inns or cheap hostels.

When writing the history of expanding infrastructure and its integrative effects on the national territory and its culture, it is difficult to elude what Jürgen Osterhammel called ‘a mild form of technological determinism’.² If Osterhammel admitted to carrying a mild form of the condition,

then Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976) might be described as a very serious case. In his account of the integration of provincial France in the late nineteenth century, Weber described how roads and railway lines reached out from Paris to regions such as Brittany and connected previously remote places with the national economy, which changed mentalities in the process and ultimately turned peasants into Frenchmen. This account of the growing contact between centre and periphery bears the hallmark of modernisation theory; provincial France was both culturally and economically transformed as it was drawn into the 'official culture' of urban Paris, the 'market economy' and 'the modern world'. For Weber, 'material circumstances had to alter' for cultural change to occur, and 'the role of road and rail in this transformation was basic'.³ There is little room for the flow of influence in the opposite direction – from the periphery to the centre – and more recent research on Brittany suggests that this relationship is better described as a dialogue that resulted in the retention of Breton culture.⁴

Nevertheless, the fact of expanding infrastructure is one that translates to Britain and Ireland. From the military survey of Scotland in 1726 to the mid-nineteenth century, the development of transport networks and modern bureaucracy produced what Jo Guldi calls the 'infrastructure state'. The flagship road-building projects stretched out from London and connected the political centre to Edinburgh along the Great North Road and to Dublin via Holyhead, integrating Scotland and Ireland into a network that created new divisions as it forged connections.⁵ These large government-funded infrastructural projects laid the foundations of the national transport network and were deemed vital to the national interest in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellions and the Acts of Union (1800). In contrast, the railway network developed in a sporadic and unsystematic manner throughout the nineteenth century. The government approved the construction of lines through acts of parliament, regulated fares, set safety standards, and provided a measure of supervision through the Board of Trade's Railway Department (from 1840), but otherwise maintained a *laissez-faire* approach to the industry. This produced an individualistic and competitive network that was driven by private investment and was characterised by parallel lines and multiple gauges.⁶ Towards the end of the nineteenth century a final burst of railway activity followed the Light Railways Act (1896), which aimed to better connect rural farming and fishing communities to domestic markets, amid agricultural depression, poverty and increasing competition from a globalising agricultural economy.⁷ Government grants and treasury loans encouraged the construction of several new lines that stretched to the furthest reaches of the west, although many of the proposed schemes remained unbuilt.⁸ The

resultant railway network emerged out of an assortment of permissive government policies and commercial interests, and by the turn of the twentieth century the coordination of these services with steamers and coaches, and facilities for cyclists and pedestrians, made the west increasingly accessible to the tourist. Late nineteenth-century guidebooks enthusiastically described the stopping points on new railway lines in Cornwall, the introduction of passenger steamship services to the Aran Islands, the tumbling journey times to Skye, the introduction of new and luxurious modes of transport, novel services designed especially for the tourist such as the Snowdon Mountain Railway, and ever more affordable prices, all of which promised to elevate the places of the west among the nation's favourite touring districts.

The rise of modern tourism in the west was deeply connected to the characteristic transformations associated with British and Irish modernity, including rapid changes in technology, commercialisation and the emergence of the infrastructure state. But these processes did not simply make the west more accessible as a travel destination. At the same time, the west was made familiar in a literary culture that described western places to an increasingly literate public. Familiar guidebook titles such as *Murray's*, *Baedeker's*, and *Black's* published new editions in quick succession to equip tourists with the latest information, and personal accounts of travel were popular with readers. As a result, the differences associated with western places were highlighted at the very moment they were being more tightly integrated into the national territory.⁹ Consequently, the west also became accessible as an imagined geography like never before. Benedict Anderson emphasised the importance of print capitalism for the creation of the 'nationally imagined community', but the special role of guidebooks and travel writing remains under-appreciated.¹⁰

This chapter describes the expansion of the transport network in the west without subscribing to a restrictive model of 'core' and 'periphery' or a linear model of modernisation.¹¹ As [Chapter 5](#) explores in more detail, the desire to develop, build and 'improve' areas of the west betrayed a modernising ethic – a capitalist rationalisation that produced infrastructures of circulation, often with destructive consequences for communities across the western peripheries.¹² However, the proliferation of travel writing and the growth in tourist traffic were not simply forces of anglicisation that exported the urban culture of London to the west. Anglicisation certainly occurred, but travel books were often penned by writers who promoted the Welsh, Irish and Gaelic languages that endured in the west, and used urban print capitalism as a vehicle for promoting strong regional and national cultural identities that could reinforce a broader sense of Britishness or bolster demands for political separation from the United

Kingdom.¹³ In the west, travellers from urban centres turned their gaze back towards home, as the ‘periphery’ became central to discussions of urban degeneration and suburbanisation, as well as to public understandings of land reform and poverty in the west. Ultimately, the encounter between travellers, writers and the people and landscapes of the west was one that left both ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ changed. Moreover, this was a polycentric network, with important travel hubs in London but also in Glasgow, Inverness, Liverpool, Holyhead, Birmingham, Dublin, Galway and Plymouth, while new centres of tourist activity emerged in Caernarfon, Penzance, Clifden and Portree. This was part of an ‘Atlantic moment’ in the history of the United Kingdom between the 1860s and 1920s, when economic dynamism was centred on the industrial cities that surrounded the Irish Sea, and politics was shaped by statesmen with Scottish connections, the Irish Parliamentary Party and the first Welsh-speaking Prime Minister.¹⁴

The creation of new connections with the west also drew attention to areas that remained outside the network such as the Llŷn Peninsula, which was specially valued for its location beyond the reach of the railway. In addition, the introduction of new technologies of transport fostered an atmosphere of excitement and changed perceptions of distance and time, but they also enhanced the effectiveness of the horse-bus, which shuttled between railway stations, provided invaluable connections with inns and town centres, and remained vital to the tourism industry well into the twentieth century.¹⁵ Innovative forms of travel found eager adherents but they also elicited new enthusiasm for pedestrianism and other, slower forms of movement. Railways, steamship services and road improvements certainly accelerated the development of modern tourism, but tourism demand also grew out of the long-term changes in living standards and the expansion of the middle-class, for whom leisure travel was an important social practice.¹⁶ There is no simple monocausal narrative because improvements in transport encouraged tourism, while at the same time growing tourist traffic stimulated further developments in the transport network.¹⁷ Drawing on the guidebooks, railway timetables, maps, advertisements and poster artwork of the period, this chapter first sketches the development of the transport network and then describes the increasingly sophisticated tourism industry, which made the west an integrated part of the national territory and the imagined community.

Cornwall

In the history of Cornwall’s integration into the national transport network, 1859 is an oft-cited date. In that year Brunel’s Royal Albert Bridge, which

spanned the River Tamar between Plymouth and Saltash, brought the Cornwall Railway down the peninsula to Truro, where, from a separate station, the West Cornwall Railway line went on to Penzance. But the history of the railway in Cornwall begins much earlier. In the mining district of Redruth, William Murdock's three-wheel steam carriage, made in 1784, frightened the local vicar, who mistook it for Satan himself. Similarly, in 1802 Richard Trevithick secured a patent for his four-wheeled steam carriage for use on roads, which terrified a turnpike keeper who dared not ask for payment in fear of 'the snorting novelty'.¹⁸ In the early and mid-nineteenth century, the development of railways in Cornwall was for the purpose of transporting tin and copper from the mines of Redruth to the port at Hayle, and for receiving consignments of coal from south Wales. This line opened for mineral traffic in 1839, took passengers from 1841, and became known as the West Cornwall Railway as it was extended in both directions to Penzance and then to Truro. From an economic perspective, the railway connected Cornwall with other industrial centres in these isles long before Brunel's bridge crossed the Tamar.

Nevertheless, 1859 remains the key date in the history of tourism, before which time the Cornish people, wrote the clergyman Victor Whitechurch, 'had not yet realised that railway travelling meant more than a local excursion'.¹⁹ In 1859 Cornwall was connected to the national railway network, opening up the duchy for tourist traffic, which quickly grew in the following decades. In 1860 Thomas Cook established a package tour that went all the way to Land's End, and by 1871 the occupation 'Guide to Land's End' appeared on the census.²⁰ The extension of railway lines and the reduction of travel times was in part driven by competition between the London and South-Western Railway and the Great Western Railway. By the end of the nineteenth century the London and South-Western Railway's North Cornwall Express service ran from London Waterloo to Padstow. After buying up the South Devon Railway and the Bristol and Exeter Railway in 1876, the Great Western Railway incorporated the West Cornwall Railway into its system from 1878 and ran its broad-gauge stock all the way from Paddington to Penzance. The transport network continued to expand, as contractors secured loans for the construction of branch lines, which were then acquired by the Great Western Railway. In 1877 a new four-mile branch line ran from St Erth along Carbis Bay to St Ives, and in 1887 a narrow-gauge branch line reached Helston, bringing travellers closer to the Lizard Peninsula. After the Great Western Railway finished converting its broad-gauge lines to narrow gauge in 1892, further extensions took the railway along the northern coast when a new station opened at Perranporth in 1903, which was later linked up with Newquay in 1905.²¹

The chief attractions of Cornwall were its cliffs, coves, seascapes and fishing villages, and tourists were duly advised to keep to the coastline when planning their trip. Typically, guidebooks recommended that visitors enter the county from Plymouth and travel down the southern coast to Penzance, perhaps taking a trip to the Scilly Isles, before returning back along the northern coastline to Tintagel and Boscastle, and exiting via Tavistock or Exeter. By the 1880s many of Cornwall's most popular destinations were readily accessible by the main and branch lines. Tourists frequented towns such as Fowey, St Austell, Truro, Penryn and Falmouth in the south, and the railway also passed through St Ives, Portreath and Newquay in the north. *Murray's Handbook for Cornwall* (1879) encouraged tourists to come to this western periphery safe in the knowledge that 'even the remote corners of Cornwall can now be nearly reached by the ramifications of the Great Western and South-Western Railways'.²² Despite the decline in the Cornish mining industry, the economic value of this network lay in the transportation of produce such as potatoes, broccoli, narcissi, daffodils, wall flowers and mackerel, which found markets in London, the Midlands, and as far away as Scotland and Ireland. But income from passenger receipts was increasingly significant. The number of passengers on the Cornwall Railway rose from an annual average of 565,821 in the 1860s to 852,429 in the 1880s. This growth continued into the early twentieth century: transport historian Jack Simmons calculated that 'average annual receipts from passengers booked at Penzance' were up 57.6 per cent for the period 1904–10 when compared with the period 1890–96.²³

However, the story of growing tourism in Cornwall is not simply one of an extending railway network. The Lizard Railway and the Penzance, Newlyn and West Cornwall Railway were among many proposed light railway schemes that were never realised.²⁴ Instead, places situated between or beyond railway stations were knitted together by horse-drawn coaches and, from the early twentieth century, motor omnibus services. Coaches and motorbuses shuttled between the railway stations, town centres and many of Cornwall's most famous destinations including Land's End, Tintagel and Kynance Cove on the Lizard Peninsula. In 1883, the tourist wishing to visit Land's End could take the omnibus service which left Penzance at nine o'clock in the morning and arrived at its destination two hours later, before returning to Penzance at three in the afternoon.²⁵

Perhaps the most dazzling expression of this new level of accessibility was the tumbling travel times. Since the 1820s, when George and Robert Stephenson's locomotives travelled at 15mph along the first steam-powered public railway between Stockton and Darlington, the pace of train travel had quickened remarkably. By the 1870s, average speeds of 40–50mph and

maximum speeds over 70mph were common in Britain, and by the turn of the twentieth century railway travel was quick, comfortable and affordable for most travellers.²⁶ The pace of travel continued to quicken and, in particular, the journey from London to Cornwall became much more convenient after the introduction of the Cornish Riviera Express service in 1904. Between 1883 and 1924, the Great Western Railway reduced the duration of the journey from London Paddington to Penzance from well over nine hours to just six-and-a-half – a record only surpassed after the introduction of high-speed trains in the late 1970s. Over the same period, the journey from Birmingham to Penzance was reduced from just under twelve hours to less than nine, and from Manchester the travel time fell from fifteen hours to twelve.²⁷

The combination of decreasing travel times and an individualistic, competitive railway system fuelled an obsession with speed that proved deadly as the fierce rivalry between the Great Western Railway and the London and South-Western Railway intensified.²⁸ Both companies ran services from London to the south-west, and in the 1890s it seemed that the London and South-Western Railway had the edge because its route to Exeter – one of the calling points on the way to Cornwall – was twenty-two miles shorter and fifteen minutes quicker than their competitor's.²⁹ In addition, the London and South-Western Railway also provided the quicker service to Plymouth, the ideal starting point from which to begin a tour of Cornwall.³⁰ The competition intensified until 1906, when a London and South-Western Railway service that was running late derailed after the driver failed to reduce speed at Salisbury, killing himself along with twenty-five others. This damaged the company's reputation – already notorious for running late – and shortly afterwards the Great Western Railway opened a new line between Castle Cary and Langport, unlocking a shorter route to the west. From 1906, the Great Western Railway reorganised its express services to the region, making it both quicker and more punctual than the London and South-Western Railway, and due to a combination of these factors the company posted a twenty-one per cent increase in total traffic between London and the West Country in the period 1904–9.³¹ Already by 1914 the Great Western Railway claimed that their route was 'the Holiday Line', and soon their trains were quicker to both Exeter and Plymouth.³² The result, according to Jack Simmons, was that 'Great Western had won the race' to the west and, after the Railways Act came into force in 1923, the introduction of the Atlantic Coast Express service from Waterloo did not make the newly formed Southern Railway a serious competitor for the annual tourist traffic, though it provided an alternative route on a glamorous service for travellers bound for north Cornwall.³³

North Wales

Before Thomas Telford's major civil engineering projects in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, travelling through north Wales was tedious and wearisome, but it was also fraught with risk and danger. In *Lives of the Engineers* (first published in 1861), Samuel Smiles described the 'rough, narrow, steep' roads that were unprotected, mostly unfenced, and were 'almost impassable' during the winter months.³⁴ A diary account of the journey between London and Holyhead in 1787 described the arduous four-day expedition, and the mail coaches and stagecoaches were frequently overturned and broke down on the difficult roads.³⁵ In the early nineteenth century, the roads of north Wales became central to the national interest because they formed part of a broader transport network that linked Dublin with London after the Acts of Union (1800). At this time, the Irish mail coach took forty-one hours to get to Holyhead from London, and the mail eventually arrived in Dublin on the third day of travel. In addition to the perilous roads, Irish MPs making the journey to Westminster had to endure the lack of adequate harbours at Dublin and Holyhead, and also needed to navigate the treacherous Menai Strait separating the island of Anglesey from the rest of Wales. The Irish Whig politician Sir Henry Parnell (great-uncle of Stewart Parnell) raised the grievances of his compatriots in parliament, and as a result Thomas Telford was appointed chief engineer and completed his survey of the route in 1811.³⁶ Parnell went on to serve in the Holyhead Roads Committee for the 1815 parliamentary session, and its recommendations were adopted by parliament.³⁷ Much like the Birmingham merchants who provided the impetus for the extension of the railway to London in the hope of tapping new markets, it was Irish MPs who pushed for better transport connections with Westminster, serving as a reminder that the drive for infrastructural expansion came from the provinces as well as from the capital.³⁸

Telford began work on the Shrewsbury to Holyhead section of the new road in 1815, and over the next decade or so the way was transformed. Charles G. Harper described the new route in *The Holyhead Road* (1902), which passed through the Vale of Conwy, crossed the river at Betws-y-Coed over the Waterloo Bridge (constructed in 1815), through Nant Ffrancon and then on to Bangor and the Menai Strait, which was bridged in 1826. Passing through the 'wildest scenery', Telford's road never exceeded a one in twenty gradient; at 28–34 feet its width made it much safer, and the 'splendid surface' made travel much quicker, in an era when stage coaches raced against each other to achieve new feats of distance and speed.³⁹ Telford also worked on the mail road that kept largely to the north coast as it crossed the Conwy Suspension Bridge (constructed in 1826),

skirted Penmaenmawr and provided an important link between Liverpool and Dublin. This was an infrastructural project of national importance, and as such a grant of just over £164,489 was made by parliament for work to be undertaken on the road and bridges. The remaining cost of just over £533,474 was provided by a Treasury loan to be repaid from the tolls.⁴⁰

In the following decades, the expansion of railway lines complemented the earlier development of the roads. As was the case in Cornwall, the early trams and rails were associated with industry, such as the Padarn Lake Railway which connected the Dinorwic slate quarry with the port on the Menai Strait from the 1840s, and the Croesor Tramway which transported slate to Porthmadog for shipment from 1864.⁴¹ After decades of construction, extensions and railway amalgamations the region was opened to tourists from the industrial centres of the Midlands and north-west England, who were advised to begin their tour at either Chester or Shrewsbury and end at the other.⁴² From Chester, the route ran along the north Wales coast, passing through the fashionable watering places Rhyl, Colwyn Bay and Llandudno – ‘the Queen of Welsh watering-places’, which by the early twentieth century boasted new electric lighting along the promenade and was home to the Happy Valley pleasure resort.⁴³ Robert Stephenson’s two tubular bridges at Conwy (1848) and the Menai Strait (1850) opened the continuous railway route to Holyhead, which made it easier for tourists to discover the region.⁴⁴ In 1859, the London and North Western Railway absorbed the Chester and Holyhead Railway, and this line became part of a much larger system with convenient links to the cities of the Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire and London. The line also connected to a branch that followed the Conwy Valley ‘into the mountain heart of “Wild Wales”’ to inland tourist hotspots such as Betws-y-Coed, which was a convenient headquarters for artists, anglers and those wishing to ascend the famed peaks of the district.⁴⁵ Alternatively, tourists travelled on the popular steamboat services that plied between Liverpool and various places along the north Wales coast.⁴⁶

The second main route entered mid-Wales from Shrewsbury, where the Great Western met the Cambrian Railway at Whitchurch and Welshpool.⁴⁷ The Cambrian line struck westwards across Wales through Newtown and Machynlleth to Dovey Junction, where the west coast branch line called at Aberdyfi, Barmouth, and took in views of Harlech and Criccieth castles on the way to Pwllheli in the north. The Cambrian Coast Express was a popular tourist train that ran between London and Aberystwyth with through coaches to Pwllheli, though the seaside resorts of the west remained far less busy than those well-established watering places along the north coast, which by the early twentieth century were less than two hours away from Liverpool and Manchester on the train.⁴⁸

The transport network of road, rail and steamboats continued to thicken in later decades. The Llandudno and Colwyn Bay electric railway served both the seaside resorts and the growing suburban population,⁴⁹ while branch lines penetrated the heart of the region. New opportunities for loop tours were opened up by extensions between Betws-y-Coed and Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1881, and through Beddgelert from 1922 along the newly formed Welsh Highland Railway.⁵⁰ The Ffestiniog Railway was originally built to connect the slate quarries of Blaenau Ffestiniog with Porthmadog, but became very popular with tourists who wanted to take in the mountainous scenery from the so-called ‘Toy Railway’.⁵¹ At the same time, horse-drawn and, later, motor coaches and bicycles were essential for those who wished to explore the mountains or venture down the Llŷn Peninsula towards Aberdaron and Ynys Enlli.⁵² Tourist-specific services emerged with the pleasure steamers that plied along the River Conwy to Trefriw, as well as the ever-popular Snowdon Mountain Railway which opened in 1896, and from 1903 the Great Orme Tramway took tourists up the headland bearing the same name, which towered above Llandudno.⁵³ By the interwar period, specially built tourist motorcoaches sped around the region on exhausting daily itineraries that exceeded 100 miles in length, and competed with the railway for the tourist traffic between Welsh resorts and Midland towns.⁵⁴ As north Wales became increasingly accessible, the growth in tourist traffic bred an atmosphere of optimism for companies such as the Great Western Railway, which hoped that the region would become ‘one of the most popular of our great national pleasure and health-giving districts’.⁵⁵

Western Connacht

In his *Guide to the Western Highlands (Connemara)* (1869), E. B. Ivatts made it clear that the reader must not expect to find fashionable watering places that might be ‘seen in a carriage in a couple of hours’. There was no seaside resort or spa ‘where old ladies drink chalybeate waters by the gallon’. On the contrary, such was the remoteness of Connemara that ‘three or four friends can easily spend there a fortnight without meeting’.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, despite its comparative remoteness, western Connacht was gradually integrated into the Irish transport network through the growth of the coach, canal and railway infrastructure in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before a final period of government-funded expansion in the decades before 1914. Charles Bianconi’s famous coaches and cars – the ‘Bians’, capable of conveying between four and twenty passengers – travelled between Galway, Clifden and Westport along roads designed by the

Scottish engineer Alexander Nimmo, whose roads, harbours and coastal surveys extended the infrastructural connections between Britain and Ireland in the early decades of the union.⁵⁷ On the waterways, the Royal and Grand Canals crossed the central plain of the country from Dublin and connected with the Shannon Navigation system in the west, before passenger traffic declined in the face of competition from the railways. From the 1840s, construction began on the Midland Great Western Railway route from Dublin to the west, and by the beginning of the twentieth century this formed part of the third largest railway system in Ireland, serving towns such as Galway, Sligo, Westport, Athlone and Mullingar.⁵⁸ Galway and Westport were connected by roads that passed through Connemara, and guidebooks recommended tours of this region – which also included excursions to Lough Corrib, the Aran Islands and Achill Island – before returning to Dublin by train.⁵⁹ The ‘Connemara and Achill’ tourist ticket made this particular route a convenient and popular one, but many others chose to make Galway their headquarters for excursions in all directions, or to pass through this central portion of Ireland’s west as part of a broader tour that took in Killarney in the south and Sligo and Donegal to the north.⁶⁰

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the infrastructural development of Ireland became an important part of British government policy, with the aim of bringing agricultural and industrial prosperity to impoverished regions and also as a means of ‘killing Home Rule with kindness’.⁶¹ In 1888 the Michael Davitt Bridge – named after the land reformer – opened across Achill Sound, providing a permanent link to the mainland that, it was hoped, would help to relieve the poverty of the islanders, as well as making visits more convenient for tourists.⁶² Following the Light Railways Acts in 1889 and 1896, a total of 309 miles of tramways and light railways were constructed in western regions, with the government providing eighty-four per cent of the £1.85m cost.⁶³ During his well-publicised tour of Connemara in 1890, Chief Secretary for Ireland (1887–91) Arthur Balfour promised that there would be extensions to the Midland Great Western Railway lines between Galway and Clifden and from Westport to Achill via Mallaranny, both of which opened in 1895 and brought the far west of Ireland into railway communication with cities such as Dublin, Belfast and Cork.⁶⁴ Between 1903 and 1906, the Midland Great Western Railway operated a tourist express service that left Dublin at mid-day, passed through Galway, and terminated at Clifden at five o’clock.⁶⁵ *Murray’s Handbook for Ireland* (1902) pronounced that the extensions would be of ‘inestimable service’ for those in search of ‘wild and picturesque scenery’, although some travellers continued to take the jaunting car between Galway and Clifden, preferring to remain on the roads.⁶⁶ No doubt the railway extensions eased the tourist’s journey, but the purported

economic benefits for the local communities were not forthcoming. The inland route taken by the Connemara line by-passed the majority of the local population who lived on the coast, and even after decades of being connected to the railway system workers from Achill Island still boarded the steamers at Westport to find seasonal work in Scotland.

Nevertheless, western Connacht was increasingly integrated into the national transport network, and this new level of accessibility led to the ambitious claim, made in *Black's Guide to Ireland* (1912), that this region of the Irish west was 'fast superseding Killarney in popularity'.⁶⁷ But once travellers had reached the west, coaches, cars and roads remained essential. As a new group of road users, cyclists benefited from a series of innovations including wheels of equal size, pneumatic tyres, ball bearings and new frames, all of which improved comfort on the rougher roads. On the west coast, cycling from south to north brought with it the additional support of the prevailing south-west wind, though cyclists were instructed to take care on the quieter country lanes because 'the horses are unaccustomed to cycles'.⁶⁸ Despite the optimism of guidebooks,⁶⁹ the rough nature of some of the roads made them wholly unsuitable for early motorcars. This was evident when Edward VII and Queen Alexandra visited the region in 1903: with their yacht anchored off Leenaun, they motored to Recess before switching to a horse-drawn carriage for the rocky trip to the local marble quarries.⁷⁰ In the hope of accelerating the development of the nascent tourism industry, the Irish Road Improvement Association was established in 1897, but the entrepreneur and Irish tourism pioneer Frederick W. Crossley remained frustrated at the lack of progress made in the following years, for which he blamed the local authorities.⁷¹ Similarly, the English barrister and travel writer J. Harris Stone felt that the Congested Districts Board should direct funds to 'solving the transit problem' in Connemara rather than investing in barrel-making, honey-dealing, and on exhibitions in St Louis, Cork, Paris and Dublin.⁷² In 1912 the Roads Board provided grants to Galway and Sligo county councils to carry out improvements to the roads, but the damage caused during the Irish Civil War (1922–23) and the financial constraints on the Cumann na nGaedheal government limited the extent to which the Irish Tourist Association saw its plans for improvements carried out during the interwar period.⁷³

The extension of travel facilities also brought Ireland into closer contact with Britain. Liverpool, Glasgow and Belfast were important points of connection, but the most popular route was the crossing between Holyhead and Dublin. In the summer of 1815 Robert Peel's passage from Holyhead to Dublin took an exhausting thirty-three hours to complete.⁷⁴ But once adequate harbours had been constructed on both sides of the Irish Sea, and connections established between quick steamboats and the main

railway system, travel times between the two islands fell dramatically. Between 1876 and 1897, the duration of the journey from London to Dublin fell from over thirteen hours to less than nine.⁷⁵ The increasing speed of travel along this route was fuelled by the development of compound steam engines that made ships more efficient, and the replacement of paddle wheels with screw propellers. In addition, the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company (which plied to Kingstown) and the London and North Western Railway (to North Wall) urgently updated their fleets as they competed for both passenger traffic and the lucrative Irish Mail contract. In guidebooks, the detailed and often boastful description of the tonnage, length and speed in knots of the two fleets reflected a preoccupation with speed and national prestige. In 1897, the German passenger steamer Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse replaced the British Cunard Line as the fastest steamship to cross the Atlantic,⁷⁶ and it was surely with this feat in mind that R. T. Lang began *Black's Guide to Ireland* (1902) with the assurance that, 'in these days when Germany is claiming the records of the sea, it is good to know that on the mail route we still have the fastest boats sailing from any port'.⁷⁷

The years before 1914 represent the apogee of western Connacht's connection to the transport network and of Ireland's integration into the infrastructure of the British-Irish Isles. In the interwar period, the consolidation of the railway companies as Great Southern Railways was followed by a shift in emphasis towards motor travel. Great Southern Railways responded by putting on motorbus services in addition to its trains, and, after taking over the Irish Omnibus Company in 1934, ran the two services in coordination with each other.⁷⁸ However, after partition and the Civil War the roads and railways of the Free State were in a damaged state, and by the end of the 1930s both the Clifden and Achill extensions had been closed, in a period of economic depression and tariff wars with the United Kingdom.

Skye

In the late eighteenth century – the period when Thomas Pennant, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell journeyed to Skye – it took around ten days by coach to get from London to Edinburgh, and an additional week to reach the Highlands of Scotland.⁷⁹ The old military roads, constructed after the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite rebellions, were not convenient for civilian use and the Highland population continued to rely on rough tracks through the mountains and glens. This began to change at the start of the nineteenth century. Telford's survey, published in 1803, was followed by decades of

construction and improvements during which hundreds of roads and bridges integrated the Highlands into the Scottish transport network. In addition, after some difficulties in its construction, from mid-century the Caledonian Canal provided a reliable route across the country, from sea to sea. As part of these monumental projects, which were funded by the state, Skye became better connected with Inverness, and new roads were built on the island itself, connecting the principal town of Portree with Dunvegan, Broadford, Kyleakin and the Totternish and Sleat peninsulas. Along these new and improved routes cattle from Skye found markets in England. At the same time, the Fishery Board carried out improvements at harbours including Portree, in the hope that connecting west coast fisheries with the rest of the country would bring economic prosperity to the Highlands and Islands west of the Great Glen, though such benefits never came to pass.⁸⁰

Before the bridge to the Scottish mainland opened in 1995, sooner or later travelling by water was essential for the visitor to Skye. In the early nineteenth century, the development of steamboats brought reliability to sea travel, which was no longer at the mercy of the wind and the tide. The River and Firth of Clyde was a busy centre of early steamboat development, and services soon reached Skye. Only venturing as far as Dunoon in 1812, by the 1820s steamboats plied to Fort William, Tobermory and Skye, to Inverness via the Caledonian Canal, and provided regular services between the cities of Glasgow, Belfast and Liverpool.⁸¹ After competing for and then jointly managing the West Highland routes, two firms – Thomson and MacConnell, and J. Martin and G. and J. Burns – sold their island-hopping vessels to David Hutchinson and Co. in 1851. Further additions to Hutchinson's fleet included the paddle steamers *Cavalier* and *Mountaineer* in 1854, followed by the *Clansman* and the first of three *Ionas* in 1855.⁸² The fleet continued to expand with three new screw-steamers called the *Clydesdale* (1861), the *Clansman* (1870) and the *Claymore* (1881), each bigger than the last. By this time David Hutchinson had retired, leaving the company in the name and control of David MacBrayne.⁸³ MacBrayne published official guides on an annual basis, providing the latest information on routes, itineraries and costs for the upcoming tourist season. The firm was praised in *Murray's Handbook for Scotland* (1883) for the way its fleet of tourist steamers enabled visitors to navigate the Western Highlands and Islands 'with perfect ease'.⁸⁴ Steamboats from Glasgow made their way to Oban, which became an important centre for Highland tourism where visitors could choose from among fifteen hotels, as well as lodging houses and temperance accommodation.⁸⁵ According to MacBrayne's *Summer Tours in Scotland* (1881), Oban was the 'Charing Cross of the Highlands', after which the steamers called at several

places on Skye, including Armadale, Isleornsay, Kyleakin, Broadford and Portree.⁸⁶

On land, Skye was gradually approached by railway lines designed to open new markets for the agricultural and fishing industries. Again, the hoped-for economic prosperity never came, but the new lines operated in coordination with steamboat services to make the Hebrides an increasingly accessible option for tourists. Authorised by the West Highland Act (1896), the West Highland Railway was extended from Fort William along the west coast to Mallaig where, with the help of a £30,000 government grant, a pier and breakwater were constructed in 1901. The train from Glasgow took around five hours and forty minutes to reach Mallaig, and during the summer carriages ran from London, connecting with the steamboats that proceeded to Portree.⁸⁷ In the north-east, Inverness became a popular headquarters from which to begin a tour of the west. In 1898, the construction of a new direct main line from Perth significantly reduced journey times, and from 1900 a summer evening express service left London at ten o'clock in the morning, arriving in Inverness half an hour before midnight.⁸⁸ As a base from which to access the Hebrides, Inverness became more convenient after the Highland Railway line was extended from Strome Ferry to Kyle of Lochalsh in 1897, where travellers could board the MacBrayne's steamboat on its way from Mallaig to Skye, which departed Kyle of Lochalsh at 2.20pm and arrived at Portree later that afternoon.⁸⁹

Once on the island, smaller boats and coaches took visitors to the principal places of interest. Two 'light' railway schemes for the island were proposed under the Light Railways Act (1896), but concerns about limited traffic, opposition to the construction costs being part-funded by raising the crofters' rates, and ultimately a failure to raise enough capital meant that neither project was realised, and so the roads and coastal sea routes remained essential to the tourist.⁹⁰ Skye was prized for its mountains, lochs, castles, rock formations and facilities for shooting – this was far removed from the busy seaside resorts that could be found on the north Wales coast and in southern Cornwall. From the headquarters of Portree, tourists took the road northwards which led to the Storr Rock on the Trotternish peninsula, and guidebooks recommended excursions to the island of Columba on Loch Snizort. At Dunvegan Castle, the seat of the MacLeod, letters from Dr Johnson, Walter Scott and Bonnie Prince Charlie could be seen alongside the mysterious Fairy Flag. From the alternative headquarters of Broadford, popular excursions ran to Loch Scavaig, the 'magnificent amphitheatre of jagged peaks', and literary tourists made for neighbouring Loch Coruisk, which is described in Walter Scott's *'Lord of the Isles'* (1815).⁹¹ The southern portion of the island was the destination for keen mountaineers, who tested their skills on the

‘bristling crescent ridges’ of the Cuillin peaks such as Sgùrr nan Gilleann, Sgùrr Dearg and Sgùrr Alasdair.⁹² The possibility of carrying bicycles onto steamboats and along stretches of moorland paths made cycling a tempting mode of transport on the island, and the arduous 100-mile Isle of Skye route was, according to the assistant editor of *Cyclists’ Touring Club Gazette*, amply repaid by the grandeur of the rugged scenery.⁹³ However, guidebooks warned prospective two-wheeled tourists about the vast distances between inns, the bumpy by-roads, and the strength of the wind, all of which made cycling a strenuous way of seeing Skye.⁹⁴ As in the west of Ireland, motorists were warned about the state of the rougher roads, which could easily ruin expensive tyres, but such risks also formed part of the appeal for the pioneers of early motoring.⁹⁵

The accessibility of Skye was part of the growing tourism industry in the Highlands, where it has been estimated around 10,000 tourists visited annually at the end of the nineteenth century.⁹⁶ Another approximation for 1921 suggests that there were over 7,000 visitors in the Highlands in June that year, even before the holiday season peaked in July and August.⁹⁷ It is probable that only a small number of these Highland tourists passed through Skye at some point. Developments in transport networks can reduce travel time and perceptions of distance only by so much, and Skye remained comparatively remote. But remoteness was a powerful part of the island’s appeal, and as Donald MacKinnon put it in *How to See Skye* (1937), by the twentieth century tourists enjoyed ‘a considerable choice of routes’, and places formerly accessible to only a few ‘are now within reach of the many’.⁹⁸

Modern tourism in the west

Once the means for accessing the west had been established, it was the duty of publishers, railway and steamboat companies, tourist boards, resort authorities, writers, artists and publicity departments to ensure that the travelling public went westwards. Their publications bear witness to the development of an increasingly interconnected and sophisticated tourism industry, which depended primarily on private enterprise in the period before the Second World War. Even during the interwar years, when tourism programmes in France, Germany and Italy enjoyed generous government investment, the development of British and Irish tourism relied on the initiative of pioneering entrepreneurs such as Frederick W. Crossley, who formed the first Irish Tourist Association in 1895.⁹⁹ In 1938, Minister for Industry and Commerce Seán Lemass admitted that in the Irish Free State the government had ‘hitherto taken little more than a

passive interest in tourist development', and the same was true in the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁰ When a group of hoteliers launched the 'Come to Britain' scheme in 1926, the Department of Overseas Trade announced their support for the venture but stopped short of providing any financial assistance. The fiscal reticence of the state was also on display after the establishment of the Travel Association of Great Britain and Ireland in 1929. The Conservative government made a subscription of £5,000 in a show of support, which was a meagre sum by French, German and Italian standards and came with no guarantee of being renewed the following year.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, the profile of western destinations was raised through a wide range of promotional activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Railway and steamboat companies cultivated strong links with other key stakeholders in the tourism industry, sharing resources and coordinating promotional campaigns in what amounted to a series of well-funded and sophisticated marketing strategies – practices that are commonly assumed to have developed in the post-1945 period.¹⁰² The London and North Western Railway established the North Wales Advertising Board in 1909, to which local resorts subscribed and pooled funds that were used to promote the region in the growing tourism market.¹⁰³ In terms of investment in advertising, the large railway companies matched some of the leading brands of the day, and as a proportion of passenger receipts the London and North Western Railway and the Great Western Railway spent as much on advertising in the early 1900s as the 'Big Four' railway companies did during the interwar period, which is considered the golden age of railway advertising.¹⁰⁴ Railway companies produced postcards, commissioned artists to design posters, and distributed bookmarks to schools and libraries; promotional films were screened in cinemas, and tear-out coupons for guidebooks were placed in newspapers.¹⁰⁵ From the 1890s, the development of halftone processes enabled the mass reproduction of high-quality photographic images with improved clarity and tonal gradation, which enhanced the visual impact of travel books alongside the sketches and illustrations of established pen-and-brush artists.¹⁰⁶ For instance, Paul Henry's iconic paintings of the Irish landscape were quickly adopted for use in promotional materials. In a London Midland and Scottish Railway poster from the 1920s, a winding track passes between whitewashed thatched cottages, behind which blue mountains rise up to meet the clouds (see [Figure 1.1](#)).¹⁰⁷ A similar Henry painting depicting a village on Achill Island was reproduced in colour for the frontispiece of Michael Floyd's *The Face of Ireland* (1937). These paintings were typical of Henry's composition and use of soft light, which was echoed in the photographic arrangement of winding roads, fields

L M S

LONDON MIDLAND & SCOTTISH RAILWAY



CONNEMARA

BY PAUL HENRY

“IRELAND THIS YEAR”

Figure 1.1 Poster, London Midland & Scottish Railway, Connemara, ‘Ireland This Year’, by Paul Henry (1877–1958), about 1925, printed by McCorquordale & Co Ltd. © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. All rights reserved. Available to license under: CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

surrounded by stone walls, placid lakes, mountains, fishing villages and stone bridges in guidebooks such as the Midland Great Western Railway guide to Connemara.¹⁰⁸

Aided by developments in mass printing, the British and Irish tourism industry was promoted in a rich and varied manner, which brought the destinations of the west to the attention of potential tourists everywhere. This was just as well, because in this period it was commonly assumed that European destinations were more popular than domestic ones. In the cartoon 'Departing for the Holidays' published in the *Daily Mirror* in 1904, John Bull appeals to the crowd of holidaymakers boarding steamers bound for the continent, asking: 'why not stop in your own country, and see something of its beauties?'¹⁰⁹ In response, destinations in the west were promoted in terms that compared them favourably with places abroad. The Great Western Railway established its own advertising department in the 1880s and drew on the artwork of the Newlyn School and the folklore collections of William Bottrell and Robert Hunt as part of a marketing strategy that advertised Cornwall as an English Mediterranean – warm, exotic and much easier to reach than southern France, northern Africa or Madeira.¹¹⁰ This comparison was made explicit in a company poster of 1908, which depicts the Cornish and Italian peninsulas in mirror image, and claims that 'There is a great similarity between Cornwall and Italy in shape, climate & natural beauties'.¹¹¹ In 1904, the company published the first edition of its series of booklets that promoted what it called *The Cornish Riviera*. After selling nearly 250,000 copies and unveiling a new express train with the same name, the preface to the second edition, published in December 1905, declared with confidence that the appellation had been unanimously ratified by the travelling public, and 'has almost achieved the distinction of becoming a household word'.¹¹² The marketing campaign seemed to work, and the term was adopted by the artist and writer Sidney Heath in *The Cornish Riviera* (1911), and J. Harris Stone also used the term for his topographical book on *England's Riviera* (1912). The commercialisation of the west was far from universally embraced, though, and many objected to the way that Cornwall was softened and made fashionable for tourist consumption. The Cornish novelist Arthur Quiller-Couch declared emphatically that 'Cornwall is NOT a "Riviera"' (he preferred 'the Delectable Duchy') because three of its four sides were surrounded by the stormy Atlantic, and Cornish historian A. K. Hamilton Jenkin reassured his readers that the coastline remained 'just as stern and rugged' as it always was, despite the mildness suggested by the term 'riviera'.¹¹³

The same strategies were at play in the promotion of north Wales. In the early 1900s the Llandudno Town Improvement Association issued a guidebook with the title *Lovely Llandudno, the Cambrian Naples*, and

a match striker from a London and North Western Railway carriage interior was decorated with an image of the pier and curved bay, reading: 'Llandudno – "The Naples of the North"'.¹¹⁴ This sobriquet was also used in the titles of promotional films produced in the 1930s, while the London and North Western Railway also likened Cardigan Bay to the Bay of Naples.¹¹⁵ The dominance of the London and North Western Railway along the north Wales coast did not stop the Great Western Railway from promoting the inland portion of the region as the 'British Tyrol' due to the combination of lakes, rivers, tree-clad mountains, fountains and valleys that evoked the 'bracing uplands of Austria and Switzerland'.¹¹⁶ A similar comparison was proposed by Jeanette Marks, an American professor of English literature, who described the mountains as 'British Alps', and her compatriot, the photographer W. I. Lincoln Adams, wrote that the Llanberis Pass had been justly called the Chamonix of Wales.¹¹⁷

One of the most prestigious forms of place promotion was the association of western locations with the monarchy. Travel companies, hotels, local development associations and publishers enthusiastically described the routes that tourists could follow in the footsteps of royalty. After Queen Victoria travelled on the firm's steamers in 1847, David MacBrayne marketed her itinerary from Glasgow to the Highlands as 'the Royal Route'. This association was reinforced in 1902, when Edward VII and Queen Alexandra cruised through the Highlands in the Royal Yacht, visiting many of the places included on the Royal Route.¹¹⁸ In Ireland, royal patronage had the potential to bring the country to the attention of the British travelling public, considered the principal market for the Irish tourism industry and a promising area of potential economic development. However, uniting Irish landscapes with the monarchy through the designation of royal routes was a contentious strategy because it represented the presence of the British state in Ireland. Nevertheless, the Prince of Wales Route was established after the journey made from Cork to Killarney by the future Edward VII in 1858, and in 1897 the Duke of York Route followed the tour taken by the Duke and Duchess along the River Shannon.¹¹⁹ In 1903, Edward and Alexandra visited Connemara and, according to the director of the Midland Great Western Railway, Joseph Tatlow, were well received by all, 'whatever their politics, or aspirations'.¹²⁰ The royal party lunched at the Railway Hotel in Recess and Tatlow considered the visit a resounding success, but in the aftermath of the tour his requests on behalf of the company for royal endorsement of the hotel – and to promote what would be designated the 'Royal Connemara Route' – were politely declined.¹²¹

Aside from royal endorsement, the western peripheries were more typically promoted through a range of images and associations that were

historical, mythical and legendary. MacBrayne's steamers plied along the Royal Route but they also promised to transport the traveller to 'the Isles of Youth', associating the Hebridean islands with the legend of Oisín, who travelled with Niamh to Tír na nÓg – the land of eternal youth.¹²² The suggestive names of the company's steamers furnished the tourist's journey with a distinctive atmosphere: the Columba and Iona called forth Celtic Christianity; the Clansman, Claymore, Chieftain, Fusilier, Grenadier and Cavalier evoked the popular, bloody and glamorised histories of clan feuds, the Civil Wars and Jacobite rebellions; while the Mountaineer, Gael and Fingal suggested a voyage of adventure into a mountainous Gaelic periphery steeped in mythology.¹²³ Such associations were reinforced in the rich imagery that adorned guidebooks. The artwork on the front cover of MacBrayne's official tourist pamphlet for 1938 is particularly arresting: a Highland warrior wearing a red tartan kilt and surrounded by fellow soldiers stands powerfully on an elevated rock and thrusts a basket-hilted claymore into the sky, while holding a targe with the other arm and gazing defiantly beyond the page.¹²⁴ The other warriors, in kilts and Balmoral bonnets, are standard-bearers holding aloft the Red Ensign, the Scottish Saltire, the Royal Banner of Scotland and two David MacBrayne banners. In striking shades of yellow, the background depicts rugged mountains rising from the calm surface of the water, on which a MacBrayne steamer continues on its voyage. A tartan border surrounds this remarkable image, and underneath the bold lettering implores the onlooker to 'See This Scotland First'.¹²⁵

Similarly, the Cornish passenger steamer SS Lyonesse plied from Penzance to the Scilly Isles and the vessel was aptly named, for it sailed over Lyonesse, the sunken land of Arthurian legend, to the islands that were supposedly once 'the peaks of the submerged realm'.¹²⁶ The Great Western Railway's Bulldog Class locomotives also evoked Arthurian legend with names such as Sir Lancelot, Tintagel, Armored, Avalon, Camelot, Lyonesse and Pendragon, and in the 1920s the Southern Railway publicity department followed suit with its N15 express passenger locomotives, which were named after Arthur's knights, Lyonesse (alternatively spelt), Excalibur, The Green Knight, and became known as the 'King Arthur' Class.¹²⁷

Some legendary associations of the landscape were, however, fabrications that were invented with the tourist firmly in mind. In Wales, *Burrow's Guide* (c.1923) told of how, in the late eighteenth century, the 'enterprising innkeeper' of the Royal Goat Hotel in Beddgelert built up a cairn in the adjoining meadow and claimed that it was the grave of Gelert – the faithful hound that was wrongfully slain by Prince Llywelyn after a tragic misunderstanding.¹²⁸ Gelert, covered in blood, was thought to have killed

Llywelyn's son and heir, but it was only after killing his dog that Llywelyn realised Gelert had in fact protected the baby from a wolf. The emotive story, combined with the creativity of the innkeeper, made for a tourist hotspot, and in the early twentieth century it was thought that most visitors to the grave still believed the tale.¹²⁹

Marketing western places as desirable destinations was underpinned by detailed itineraries, descriptive passages, advertisements and timetables that explained how the tourist's experience would be shaped by a wide range of well-coordinated services. From the 1840s until the early twentieth century, Railway Clearing House made possible the purchase of 'through' tickets by distributing the income from passenger receipts to the appropriate railway companies, allowing passengers to travel seamlessly across a competitive system.¹³⁰ At the same time, travel agencies performed a crucial logistical role in the organisation of tours. By the late nineteenth century, agents issued combination tickets that were valid across multiple transport services along with coupons for accommodation, while their local offices arranged appropriate excursions for the incoming tourists, in what was an early form of package holiday.¹³¹ This service grew in importance as leisure travel became increasingly within reach for less affluent social groups, because it allowed tourists working to stricter budgets to accurately calculate the overall cost of a holiday in advance.¹³² Railway and steamboat companies either worked alongside travel agents or adopted similar practices and forged their own links in the creation of 'Tourist Programmes'. For instance, in the forty-eight-page Tourist Programme for 1903, MacBrayne's provided detailed information about its array of tours that combined rail, coach and steamer travel and ran in connection with trains and steamers arriving into Glasgow, Fort William, Oban and Inverness from all corners of the British-Irish Isles. On tours ranging from day or weekend excursions to more leisurely cruises, MacBrayne's allowed tourists to break their journey so that they could, for instance, take the special summer excursion steamer from Mallaig to Skye, for the purpose of visiting Loch Scavaig and Loch Coruisk.¹³³ The flexibility of this system is reflected in the range of tickets available, from single and return fares to the sixty-shilling Weekly Ticket that allowed for six days of consecutive pleasure sailing, and Tourist Tickets that remained valid for six months after purchase.¹³⁴ Similar provisions could be found in north Wales, where Tourist Tickets allowed for breaks in the journey at places of interest, and weekly or fortnightly Holiday Contract Tickets permitted travel on the London and North Western Railway's trains as well as the boats of the Liverpool and North Wales Steamship Company.¹³⁵

Even in the less-frequented regions of the west, facilities for the tourist became more dependable. From the 1890s, travellers boarded the Galway

Steamboat Company's vessel the SS Dun Aengus for a day trip to the Aran Islands, whereas previously they were advised to seek passage in the fishing boats or to hire a boat themselves.¹³⁶ The steamer provided regular contact with the mainland for the islanders, and it was on this service that J. M. Synge left Galway for Inis Mór in an atmospheric shroud of mist.¹³⁷ Timetables, with their itineraries, tourist services, lists of calling points and formulaic layout, suggest at first glance that travelling became more regulated, bureaucratic and predictable – in other words, more modern. However, as any traveller will verify, the timetable implies a level of inviolable surety that is not always fulfilled. Even scheduled services that catered for the lucrative tourist crowd were subject to human impulse, as the Irish essayist and journalist Robert Lynd found out when he attempted to take the Lough Corrib Steamboat Company service from Galway to Cong. Like any well-prepared traveller, Lynd consulted the guidebooks and timetables in advance, but on arriving at the landing stage for the scheduled three-o'clock boat, he was informed that there would be no service that day because the captain was away at the races. Incredulous, Lynd waited a while to no avail, and was dismayed that 'no public announcement of this earth-shaking change had been made in the time-table of the Cong steamer'.¹³⁸

Aided by the Joint Stock Companies Act (1844) and limited liability legislation in the 1850s, British and Irish railway companies began to diversify their range of operations and made efforts to achieve, as L. M. McCraith put it, 'the absolute monopoly over tourists' expenditure'.¹³⁹ The London and North Western Railway began to provide combined rail and road tickets for the north Wales region, while the Great Western Railway opened a hotel at Tregenna Castle in 1878, and established its own bus services in Cornwall from 1903.¹⁴⁰ In Ireland, the public and mail car services between Clifden and Westport were superseded by the Midland Great Western Railway's own motor coach services, and the company opened railway hotels at Galway, Mallaranny and Recess.¹⁴¹ By 1913 there were 112 railway hotels in the United Kingdom,¹⁴² which provided lodgings alongside a wide variety of commercial hotels, family hotels and rural inns. As leisure travel became increasingly affordable hotels and inns were supplemented by hostels, which proliferated in the interwar period. After forming in 1929 and establishing seven hostels across north Wales, the Merseyside Youth Hostel Association (YHA) quickly expanded into a national body, and by 1932 there were 150 hostels available to its membership of 20,000.¹⁴³ The Scottish Youth Hostels Association also grew rapidly, amassing 57 hostels and nearly 39,000 members by 1944. A cluster of hostels opened in the north-western Highlands of Scotland, including at Kyle of Lochalsh, Ullapool, Loch Gairloch and the rather basic hostel at Uig on Skye.¹⁴⁴

Guidebooks described how the proliferation of hotels, inns and boarding houses turned quiet seaside villages into lively centres for excursions, and the rapid pace of development had the ability to turn the natural advantages of beaches and cliffs into 'local profit', but also brought with it the risk of spoiling rural areas by 'the ravages of the builder'.¹⁴⁵ Hotels eagerly publicised the investments that had been made to expand their facilities so that visitors could replicate elite leisure pursuits at affordable prices.¹⁴⁶ In addition to lodgings and food, Mongan's Hotel in Carna, County Galway, provided guides, boats, and was situated in a landscape well suited to hunting, shooting and angling.¹⁴⁷ On Lough Corrib, fishing parties occupied the cottage on Inishshanboe Island during the summer, while the Leenaun Hotel – situated in the solitudes of Connemara – provided fishing rights in nearby streams and lochs, and access to 10,000 acres of shooting stocked with grouse, hares and snipe.¹⁴⁸ In western Wales, establishments such as Hendre Hall in Barmouth and the Prince of Wales Hotel in Caernarfon drew attention to the recent redecoration and enlargement of their rooms, as well as sea and mountain views, and facilities for popular pastimes such as golf and tennis.¹⁴⁹ Cobden's Hotel, situated in Capel Curig on the banks of the Llugwy River, advertised the trout and salmon fishing to be had in the surrounding lakes and rivers, and guests had access to a private lake stocked with five-year-old rainbow trout as well as 15,000 'strictly preserved and reserved' acres of shooting for grouse, pheasant and woodcock.¹⁵⁰

However, for all their bold lettering and enticing offers, advertisements for hotels in Connemara and Skye did not disclose the history of evictions, famine, clearances and emigration that produced the vast empty moorlands and hill country so highly valued by anglers and hunters. In her account of travelling in the Hebrides, the Scottish writer Constance Gordon-Cumming quoted at length evidence given to the Napier Commission (1883), which was tasked with investigating the conditions of the crofters in the Highlands. The collected testimonies revealed that four Skye townships were cleared 'to make room for the deer'. Moreover, the crofters were prohibited from keeping dogs, which meant that sheep from the large farms strayed unchecked onto their pasture, and their crops were eaten by the deer.¹⁵¹ Six years later, the American couple Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell saw just one man fishing and another shooting as they travelled south from Dunvegan through miles of Skye moorland that had been cleared of its inhabitants for the sake of 'a fortnight's amusement' for a handful of wealthy visitors.¹⁵² From 1882, the crofters of Skye responded with a series of disturbances known as the Crofters' War, which took the form of rent strikes, the destruction of fences, the occupation of farms and the mutilation or killing of livestock – events which, it seems, did not deter tourists

from visiting the island in the 1880s.¹⁵³ The Glendale shoots were unable to proceed that season, and the government sent troops to defend the rent-collecting and eviction-serving sheriffs, as the crofters protested the system of land tenure that gradually began to change after the Crofters Holdings Act (1886).

The land question collided with tourism in Connacht, too. After the Land War broke out in 1879, the Land League's agrarian agitation took similar forms to that in Skye, including no-rent campaigns, the targeting of livestock and boycotting. Travellers to the region described episodes of agitation such as the riots at Kilvine, Carraroe and Maam, and explained that land agents went about their business 'guarded by two policemen armed with double-barrelled guns loaded with slugs'.¹⁵⁴ The Scottish lawyer and writer Alexander Innes Shand suggested that the agitation deterred tourists from the region,¹⁵⁵ but for the landowner Mrs C. J. Blake the tourist traffic offered a means of fighting back against the Land League, after her 400-acre farm was boycotted. Mrs Blake's situation achieved notoriety and in 1881 parliament heard conflicting statements concerning the wellbeing of the tenants on the estate. After receiving financial support from the Blake Fund Committee (to which Arthur Balfour subscribed), in 1883 Mrs Blake opened the family house as the Renvyle House Hotel, which hosted the authors Edith Somerville and Martin Ross (Violet Martin) during their journey *Through Connemara in a Governess Cart* (1893).¹⁵⁶

Conclusion

In this chapter, the historical sketch of transport infrastructure and the tourism industry reveals how different forms and degrees of mobility intersected in the west: artists and writers seeking material for cultural revival sat on steamers alongside islanders returning from the mainland markets; Irish MPs attending parliamentary sessions at Westminster were conveyed along the same routes as the mail; tourists escaping city life for Connemara or Skye were joined by soldiers and police during outbreaks of agrarian agitation; journalists, commissioners and self-appointed amateur social investigators collected evidence from locals for interested readers; and host populations responded to the mobility of others by providing accommodation, acting as guides, traversing the local road networks and shaping the experiences of visitors. By the late nineteenth century, travelling to the farthest reaches of the west was no longer so protracted or dangerous, but increasing accessibility unfolded as a series of uneven developments – Skye and western Connacht remained less frequented by visitors than the seaside resorts of north Wales or the coastal towns of Cornwall. But across

the west, guidebooks and travel books exhibited a clear awareness of time-space compression, and marvelled at the changes that had taken place since the days of Thomas Pennant and Dr Johnson.¹⁵⁷

Infrastructural transformation was not confined to the western areas of the British-Irish Isles, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it seemed that the world was being remade by technologies that defied space. Railway lines multiplied in Germany, France and Russia, creating new connections between European nations, and great distances were overcome by the first transcontinental railroad in the United States (1869), the Canadian Pacific Line (1886) and the Trans-Siberian Railway (1904). Distant landmasses were connected by ever-quickenings steamboats and the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), while telegraph and telephone wires increased the range and immediacy of global communication. That these developments were inextricably linked to the rapid expansion of colonialism is conveyed by Cecil Rhodes's unrealised ambition to build a continuous railway line over the African continent from Cape Town to Cairo. Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) was a fictional account of a global form of travel that also took place in real life. By the 1870s paying customers could take Thomas Cook's tour 'Round the World, by Steam' and in 1890 the American journalist Nellie Bly achieved the feat in just 72 days.¹⁵⁸ All of these transformations created the sense that, as H. G. Wells put it, 'the world grows smaller and smaller' and that national borders were becoming obsolete.¹⁵⁹

But at the same time as empires and trade networks were expanding, the territory of the state was consolidated by the very same infrastructure of roads, railways and maritime steam power, as well as by school systems, the postal service, mass-circulation newspapers and bureaucracies that were organised along national lines.¹⁶⁰ In the USA, the Frontier Myth represented a quite distinctive case of how the territorial consolidation of the west was freighted with symbolic and ideological power that shaped the national consciousness.¹⁶¹ To the late nineteenth-century readers and travellers in the British-Irish Isles, Skye, the highlands of western Connacht, the mountains of north Wales and the cliffscapes of western Cornwall were no longer a collection of distant and unfamiliar peripheries. They were made accessible through a combination of large infrastructural projects, the coordination of transport services, a growing number of accommodation providers, and promotional campaigns that exploited emerging printing techniques, royal endorsement, and deep associations between the places of the west and historical events, myths and legends. The remaining chapters in this book examine how western landscapes, now within both physical and imaginative reach, became the subject of a 'westward gaze' that shaped British and Irish history.

Notes

1. J. Simmons, 'Railways, Hotels, and Tourism in Great Britain 1839–1914', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984), 201–22, at 213–15. The aphorism relating to Skye was attributed to Dean Stanley, in A. R. H. Moncrieff and W. Smith Jr., *The Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (London, 1907), 17.
2. J. Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. P. Camiller (Princeton, NJ, 2014), 712.
3. E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernisation of Rural France 1870–1914* (Stanford, CA, 1976), x, 203–6.
4. C. Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany* (Princeton, NJ, 1993).
5. J. Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).
6. J. Simmons, *The Railways of Britain* (London, 1986), 12–26.
7. J. Moore, 'The "Last Railway Mania": The Light Railways Act of 1896 and Local Railway Construction in Britain', *Journal of Transport History* 41, no. 2 (2020), 229–53, at 229–33. Instead of the costly and time-consuming process of authorising railway lines by acts of parliament, proposals for light railway lines were considered by the Light Railway Commissioners and the final decision rested with the Board of Trade.
8. P. Bosley, *Light Railways in England and Wales* (Manchester, 1990), 2–3, 7, 65.
9. Robbins, *Nineteenth-century Britain*, 27–8.
10. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006 [1983]), 42–6; J. M. Mackenzie, 'Empires of Travel: British Guide Books and Cultural Imperialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries', in *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict*, ed. J. K. Walton (Clevedon, 2005), 19–38, at 21.
11. For the model of core and periphery, see Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*.
12. D. Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin, 2008), 1–6; for a discussion of how this perspective has shaped the dominant narratives of British and Irish history, see Gange, *Frayed Atlantic Edge*, 339–47; for railways and the development of infrastructures of circulation in a colonial context, see M. Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago, 2004), 48–9, 61–2.
13. Beatty, 'Gaelic League', 58–9; A. Bourke, 'Re-imagining the Gaeltacht: Maps, Stories, and Places in the Mind', in *Re-imagining Ireland*, ed. A. H. Wyndham (Charlottesville, 2006), 82–98, at 84–6.
14. C. Harvie, *A Floating Commonwealth: Politics, Culture, and Technology on Britain's Atlantic Coast, 1860–1930* (Oxford, 2008); K. Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London, 1993), 246–51.
15. David Edgerton argues that histories of technology are innovation-centric, and neglect the continued significance of older technologies: D. Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (London, 2008), ix–xviii.
16. J. K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750–1914* (Leicester, 1983), 20–23.
17. A. Durie, *Scotland and Tourism: The Long View, 1700–2015* (London, 2017), 28.
18. V. L. Whitechurch, 'The West Cornwall Railway', *The Railway Magazine* 4 (1899), 162–9, at 162–3.

19. Whitechurch, 'The West Cornwall Railway', 164.
20. J. Vernon, 'Border Crossings: Cornwall and the English (Imagi)nation', in *Imagining Nations*, ed. G. Cubitt (Manchester, 1998), 153–72, at 163; M. Ireland, 'Land's End, Cornwall, England', in *The Tourism Imaginary and Pilgrimages to the Edges of the World*, ed. N. Herrero and S. Roseman (Bristol, 2015), 62–91, at 84.
21. Great Western Railway [GWR], *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 51; Whitechurch, 'West Cornwall Railway' (1899), 167–8.
22. *Murray's Handbook for Cornwall*, 9th edn (1879), introduction, 10.
23. Simmons, 'Railways, Hotels', 214–15.
24. Bosley, *Light Railways*, 65.
25. C. S. Ward, *Thorough Guide Series. North Devon and North Cornwall* (London, 1883), 15–16.
26. E. Zuelow, *A History of Modern Tourism* (London, 2016), 52; T. Croal, *A Book About Travelling Past and Present* (London and Edinburgh, 1877), 583–4.
27. Ward, *North Devon and North Cornwall* (1883), 8, 10; C. S. Ward and M. J. B. Baddeley, *Thorough Guide Series. South Devon and South Cornwall*, 9th edn (London, 1924), p. 16.
28. Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, 109–30.
29. Ward and Baddeley, *South Devon and South Cornwall* (1884), 1.
30. J. Simmons, 'South-Western v. Great Western: Railway Competition in Devon and Cornwall', *The Journal of Transport History* 4, no. 1 (1959), 13–34, at 34.
31. 'South-Western Boat Train Wrecked', *The Times*, 2 July 1906, 6; Simmons, 'South-Western v. Great Western', 28–30.
32. The Great Western Railway, *The Cornish Riviera: Our National Health and Pleasure Resort*, 4th edn (London, 1914), 5, 113; Ward and Baddeley, *South Devon and South Cornwall* (1924), 15–16.
33. Simmons, 'South-Western v. Great Western', 30–33.
34. S. Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers*, vol. 3, *History of Roads; Metcalfe; Telford*, rev. ed. (London, 1874), 253.
35. Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers*, vol. 3, 252–5n.
36. C. G. Harper, *The Holyhead Road: The Mail-Coach Road to Dublin*, vol. 1, *London to Birmingham* (London, 1902), 18–20.
37. M. Hughes, 'Telford, Parnell, and the Great Irish Road', *The Journal of Transport History* 6, no. 4 (1964), 199–209, at 199.
38. Harper, *Holyhead Road*, 21–2, 34–5.
39. Harper, *Holyhead Road*, 20–22.
40. Figures taken from the Parliamentary Return (1839), quoted in Harper, *Holyhead Road* (1902), 21–2. By 1839, over £250,880 had been repaid.
41. P. Johnson, *The Welsh Narrow-Gauge Railways* (Weybridge, 1985).
42. The railway networks linked this region with urban centres in England more so than with those in south Wales; see Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 8; K. Jones, C. Tully, and H. Williams, 'Travel Writing and Wales', *Studies in Travel Writing* 18, no. 2 (2014), 101–6, at 101–2.
43. The London and North Western Railway [LNWR], *Tourist Guide to North Wales* (London, 1909), 59–60.
44. Walton, *English Seaside Resort*, 22.

45. Quotation from Eyre-Todd, *Through England and Scotland* (1903), 81; Ward and Lock's (*Late Shaw's*) *Illustrated Guide to, and Popular History of North Wales* (London, 1883), 24–5; LNWR, *North Wales* (1909), 70–73.
46. LNWR, *North Wales* (1909), 153. The service was operated by the Liverpool and North Wales Steamship Company from the 1890s, when it took over the Liverpool, Llandudno and Welsh Coast Steamboat Company.
47. Cambrian Railways formed in the 1860s as an amalgamation of existing railways, including the Newtown and Machynlleth line and the Aberystwith [*sic*] and Welsh Coast Railway. In 1922, Cambrian Railways amalgamated with the Great Western Railway.
48. LNWR, *North Wales* (1909), 56; J. K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2000), 28–30.
49. Moore, 'Light Railways Act', 243.
50. 'Blaenau Festiniog', *North Wales Express*, 1 April 1881, 5; The London and North Western Railway, *Tours in North, South and Central Wales, the English Lake District, Leamington, Buxton, and the Isle of Man* (1899) 27; *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to Llandudno and North Wales (Northern Section)*, 9th edn (London, 1925), x.
51. *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to North Wales (Southern Section)*, 4th edn (London, 1912), 122–3. The anglicised spelling of Ffestiniog as 'Festiniog' was used in the 1832 Act of Incorporation.
52. Bardsey Island.
53. Despite a disaster on the opening day, when a locomotive was lost down the mountainside and one man died, the Snowdon Mountain Railway was popular with tourists when it reopened with additional safety measures the following year.
54. *Llandudno and North Wales (Northern)* (1925), 28–9, 35.
55. The Great Western Railway, *North Wales: The British Tyrol* (London, 1906), viii.
56. E. B. Ivatts, *Guide to the Western Highlands (Connemara)* (Dublin, 1869), n.p.
57. M. J. O'Connell, *Charles Bianconi: A Biography 1786–1875* (London, 1878), 74–5, 89–92; A. Pilz, 'Great Works: Archipelagic Romanticisms on the Connemara Coast', *Coastal Studies and Society* 2, No. 1 (2023), 82–111.
58. J. Tatlow, *Fifty Years of Railway Life in England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1920), 116.
59. R. T. Lang, *Black's Guide to Ireland*, 24th edn (1906), 215–33.
60. J. Cooke, ed., *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, 6th edn (London, 1906), advertiser, 4; Midland Great Western Railway of Ireland, *Galway, Connemara, Achill, and the West of Ireland* (Dublin, 1896), viii–ix.
61. Conservative politician Gerald Balfour (Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1895–1900) made this comment after the 1895 general election. For a detailed account of changes in government policy towards Ireland, see K. T. Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia: British Politicians and Ireland 1800–1921* (Oxford, 2016).
62. A. J. Hayes, 'A Holiday in the Far West. Achill Island', *The Leisure Hour*, xliii (1894), 636–40, at 637.
63. Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, 274–5.
64. For an account of Balfour's tour, see *Mr Balfour's Tours in Connemara and Donegal, by the Special Commissioner of the Daily Express* (Dublin, 1890).
65. K. O'Connor, *Ironing the Land: The Coming of the Railways in Ireland* (Dublin, 1999), 90.

66. J. Cooke, ed., *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Ireland*, 6th edn (London, 1902), introduction, 9; C. M. Taylor Jr., *The British Isles through an Opera Glass* (Philadelphia, 1899), 150.
67. *Black's Guide to Ireland*, 8th edn (London, 1912), x.
68. Cooke, ed., *Murray's Ireland* (1902), introduction, 12.
69. Cooke, ed., *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 13.
70. Tatlow, *Railway Life*, 173–4.
71. I. Furlong, *Irish Tourism 1880–1980* (Dublin, 2009), 25, 31–3.
72. J. H. Stone, *Connemara and the Neighbouring Spots of Beauty and Interest* (London, 1906), 74.
73. Furlong, *Irish Tourism*, 33–4; E. Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity since the Irish Civil War* (Syracuse, NY, 2009), 192–3.
74. Hoppen, *Governing Hibernia*, 42.
75. W. Steel, *The History of the London and North Western Railway* (London, 1914), 364, 450.
76. Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, 109–10.
77. R. T. Lang, ed., *Black's Guide to Ireland*, 5th edn (London, 1902), v–vi.
78. T. Ferris, *Irish Railways: A New History* (Dublin, 2008), 176–7.
79. P. Hulme and T. Youngs, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. P. Hulme and T. Youngs (Cambridge, 2002), 1–14, at 6.
80. Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers*, 190–205, 217, 234–5.
81. J. Kennedy, *The History of Steam Navigation* (Liverpool, 1903), 275.
82. The first two Ionas were sold to the Confederate States in the 1860s, but never made it across the Atlantic to join efforts to evade the Union blockade during the US Civil War.
83. Kennedy, *History of Steam Navigation*, 275–81.
84. *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Scotland*, 5th edn (Edinburgh, 1883), introduction, 12.
85. R. W. Butler, 'Evolution of Tourism in the Scottish Highlands', *Annals of Tourism Research* 12, no. 3 (1985), 371–91, at 381.
86. David MacBrayne, *Official Guide. Summer Tours in Scotland. Glasgow to the Highlands* (Glasgow, 1881), 1, 20.
87. D. T. Timins, 'The Mallaig Extension of the West Highland Railway', *The Railway Magazine* 8 (1901), 400–10, *passim*; A. Newlands, *The Scottish Railways: A Sketch of Their Growth and Recent Developments* (London, 1921), 17–18; G. Dow, *The Story of the West Highland*, rev. edn (Northern Books: 2001 [1944]), 12–13, 15.
88. H. A. Vallance, *The Highland Railway*, 5th extended edn, extra material by C. R. Clinker and A. J. Lambert (Isle of Colonsay, 1996 [1938]), 86–7.
89. David MacBrayne, *Summer Tours in Scotland. Glasgow and the Highlands* (Glasgow, 1903), 'Time Table and Tourist Programme', 7, 28, 40.
90. Vallance, *Highland Railway*, 61–3.
91. J. D. Mackie and T. M. Finlay, *The Complete Scotland: A Comprehensive Survey, Based on the Principal Motor, Walking, Railway and Steamer Routes* (London, 1933), 246.
92. H. Batsford and C. Fry, *The Face of Scotland*, 2nd edn (London, 1934 [1933]), 37–8.

93. *Black's Guide to Scotland*, 15th edn (London, 1920), 150.
94. F. Muirhead, ed., *The Blue Guides: Scotland* (London, 1927), xlviii; *Black's Scotland* (1920), 142.
95. *Black's Guide to Scotland*, 33rd edn (London, 1903), 552; *Black's Scotland* (1920), 152; J. R. Gold and M. M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750* (Aldershot, 1995), 124–5.
96. C. Smout, 'Tours in the Scottish Highlands from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries', *Northern Scotland* 5 (1983), 99–121, at 120, quoted in K. Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland, 1770–1914: Creating Caledonia* (Abingdon, 2017), 49.
97. Butler, 'Evolution of Tourism', 387–8.
98. MacKinnon, *How to See Skye* (1937), 14.
99. Zuelow, *Modern Tourism*, 144–5; Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish*, xx–xxi; D. J. Wilson, 'The Tourist Movement in Ireland', *Journal of Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, xi (1901), 56–63, *passim*.
100. Furlong, *Irish Tourism*, 60.
101. The government subscription was discussed in parliament, 22 April 1929, accessed 1 February 2025, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1929-04-22/debates/e16547e8-5e6b-4684-a1fe-a06351bcc1b1/TravelAssociation\(GovernmentSubscription\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1929-04-22/debates/e16547e8-5e6b-4684-a1fe-a06351bcc1b1/TravelAssociation(GovernmentSubscription)); for figures on government investment in Germany and Italy, see Zuelow, *Modern Tourism*, 144–5.
102. A. Medcalf, '"We Are Always Learning": Marketing the Great Western Railway, 1921–39', *The Journal of Transport History* 33, no. 2 (2012), 186–211, at 187.
103. D. A. Turner, '"Delectable North Wales" and Stakeholders: The London and North Western Railway's Marketing of North Wales, c.1904–1914', *Enterprise and Society* 19, no. 4 (2018), 894–902.
104. Hiroki Shin, 'The Art of Advertising Railways: Organisation and Coordination in Britain's Railway Marketing, 1860–1910', *Business History* 45, no. 2 (2014), 187–213, at 201–2; Turner, 'Marketing North Wales', 870.
105. Turner, 'Marketing North Wales', 871, 885, 890–2. LNWR's 1909 advertising campaign resulted in over 80,000 requests for guidebooks.
106. E. H. Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture 1884–1929* (Baltimore, 2005), 162–3.
107. 'Connemara by Paul Henry' c.1925 [London Midland and Scottish Railway poster], accessed 1 February 2025, <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co228157/connemara-poster>.
108. The Midland Great Western Railway of Ireland, *Connemara: The Famed Holiday Resort amid the Western Irish Highlands* (Dublin, n.d. [c.1922]), *passim*.
109. W. K. Haselden, 'Departing for the Holidays', *Daily Mirror*, 1 July 1904, British Cartoon Archive, accessed 1 February 2025, <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=WH0025&pos=22>.
110. S. Trower, 'On the Cliff Edge of England: Tourism and Imperial Gothic in Cornwall', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40, no. 1 (2012), 199–214, at 201; GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 6.
111. 'See Your Own Country First', 1908 [Great Western Railway poster], accessed 17 July 2025, <https://www.scienceandsociety.co.uk/results.asp?image=10701932&itemw=4&itemf=0001&itemstep=1&itemx=1>. The two women depicted in the centre, wearing the traditional costumes of the respective peninsulas and gazing directly at the viewer, indicate the sexist overtones of the term 'natural beauties'.

112. GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 5–6; for the sales figures, see GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1914), 5.
113. A. Quiller-Couch, 'Introduction to Cornish Section', in *Burrow's Guide to Devon and Cornwall* (Cheltenham, 1921), 101–7, at 105; A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, *Cornwall and the Cornish* (1933), reprinted in A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, *Cornwall and Its People* (London, 1948), 124–315, at 124.
114. A. G. Moy, *Lovely Llandudno, the Cambrian Naples* (Llandudno, n.d. [c.1910]); the London and North Western Railway, enamel pictorial matchstriker depicting Llandudno, n.d., accessed 1 February 2025, <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co206156/matchstriker-london-north-western-railway-matchstriker>.
115. 'Naples of the North – Llandudno Pathé Pictorial No. 689', 1931 [film], accessed 1 February 2025, <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-the-naples-of-the-north-llandudno-pathe-pictorial-no-689-1931-online>; Llandudno Town Hall Publicity Department, 'Llandudno "The Naples of the North"', 1938 [film], accessed 1 February 2025, <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-llandudno-the-naples-of-the-north-1938-online>; The London and North Western Railway, *Tourist Guide to North Wales* (London, 1908), 144.
116. GWR, *British Tyrol* (1906), v–vii.
117. J. Marks, *Gallant Little Wales: Sketches of Its People, Places and Customs* (Boston, MA, 1912), vii–viii; W. Adams, *Photographing in Old England, with Some Snap Shots in Scotland and Wales* (New York, 1910), 57.
118. MacBrayne, *Summer Tours in Scotland* (1903), n.p., see frontmatter.
119. For a detailed discussion of the 1897 visit, see K. J. James, 'Imprinting the Crown on Irish Holiday-Ground: Marking and Marketing the Duke of York Route 1897', in *Royal Tourism: Excursions around Monarchy*, ed. P. Long and N. J. Palmer (Bristol, 2008), 62–79.
120. Tatlow, *Railway Life*, 173. For an account of how royal visits polarised opinion within the nationalist community, see S. Pašeta, 'Nationalist Responses to Two Royal Visits to Ireland, 1900 and 1903', *Irish Historical Studies* 31, no. 124 (1999), 488–504.
121. James, 'Imprinting the Crown', 64. The request was endorsed by the Anglo-Irish political and agricultural reformer, Horace Plunkett.
122. MacBrayne, *Royal Route* (1938), see front cover and 2–3.
123. David MacBrayne, *The Royal Route. Summer Tours in the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1911), facing 180.
124. The basket-hilted claymore (sword) and the targe (shield) are traditional Highland weapons.
125. MacBrayne, *Royal Route* (1938), see front cover.
126. GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 69.
127. For a full list of Great Western Railway Bulldog Class locomotive names, see: http://www.greatwestern.org.uk/m_in_440_bulldog1.htm [accessed 1 February 2025].
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Part II

ENCHANTMENT

Chapter 2

The westward gaze – elusive islands

Along the outstretched peninsulas and rocky headlands of the Atlantic coastlines, stories abound of sunken lands, phantom islands and distant lands of immortality. In west Wales the drowned kingdom of Cantre'r Gwaelod reputedly lies under the shallow waters of Cardigan Bay, and the sunken Arthurian realm of Lyonesse is said to be located off the Cornish coast between Land's End and the Scilly Isles. From the west coast of Ireland travellers looked for the phantom island Hy Brasil, and both western Ireland and the Hebrides are associated with the otherworldly island paradise Tír na nÓg. The following two chapters explore how stories of sunken lands and islands beyond the horizon enchanted travellers at the western edge, and they present two key arguments. Firstly, this chapter argues that the highly stylised descriptions of travelling westwards constitute what I call the 'westward gaze'. Historians and literary scholars usually consider western landscapes in their immediate national contexts, and therefore the broader significance of the west has been overlooked. This chapter explores the ideas and experiences that characterised westward travel in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. After physically or imaginatively gazing westwards in the direction of their destination from afar, travellers described the journey as a departure from anglicised areas of the British-Irish Isles and highlighted the changes in the landscape that marked the transition. Finally, they gazed towards the hazy, indistinct horizon from the western edges of the land, at which point their thoughts turned to sunken lands and islands of immortality.

The second argument, developed across [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#), is that travellers' and readers' engagement with stories of sunken lands and mysterious islands can be understood as expressions of modern enchantment. This claim sits within a growing body of historical research that challenges

the notion that disenchantment is one of the fundamental characteristics of modernity.¹ The disenchantment thesis claims that as societies become more modern, science, technological progress, bureaucratisation and rationality demystify and ultimately replace religion, spirituality, imagination and wonder.² By this reasoning, any residual or emergent enchantment in Western society is an atavism. As Max Weber put it, the result of disenchantment is that there are no 'mysterious' forces in the world and 'all things' can be mastered 'by calculation'.³ In contrast, the philosophers and sociologists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno claimed that this so-called 'disenchanted' modernity was in fact a sinister, oppressive and deceptive form of enchantment, which protected the capitalist system by imbuing it with a 'mystical aura'.⁴ More recently, however, historians and literary scholars have begun to recognise what Joshua Landy and Michael Saler call re-enchantment – the deliberate and secular strategies that reimbued the world with a sense of mystery, wonder and purpose in response to both the disenchanting effects of modernity and the beguiling enchantments of modern media and markets.⁵

Modern enchantment took various forms, including playful indulgence in stories of sunken lands and mythical islands, which remained palpable only for as long as the story lasted. Saler calls this the 'ironic imagination', which creates room for people to 'play without relinquishing their grip on reality'. Travel writers indulged in stories of sunken lands and mythical islands with a 'double-minded consciousness', using storytelling conventions, interruptions, quips and undercutting remarks to share this experience with their readers. For Saler, this is a form of modern enchantment because, even as scepticism is held at bay, 'complete belief is undercut by an ironic awareness that one is holding scepticism at bay'.⁶ There was also a philosophical and spiritual form of enchantment provoked by the affecting encounter with cliffscapes, seascapes, the sinking sun, waves, mist, wind and haze, which made it possible for travellers to experience what Landy and Saler call a 'quasi-mystical union with something larger than oneself'.⁷ A third form of enchantment emanated from scientific fields such as physics, geology and archaeology, which revealed tantalising evidence suggesting that some accounts of sunken or elusive land might have a basis in fact. This imbued otherwise fantastical stories with a different kind of imaginative power that relied on the very rational, scientific and technological developments traditionally understood as agents of disenchantment. At the edge, landscapes, seascapes, folklore, mythology, physics, geology and marine archaeology combined to produce wonder, mystery and a deeply felt sense of connection with something greater than the individual, which arose from the tantalising interplay of the known and the unknown.⁸

The westward gaze

In the opening pages of *The Land of Wales* (1937), Eiluned and Peter Lewis explained that the traveller setting forth from Paddington or Euston is ‘about to travel backwards, as well as westwards, for Wales is a storehouse of the past’. This was an enchanted past, where ‘[t]races of submerged forests, stories of sunken cities and lost kingdoms haunt the coast from end to end’.⁹ Travel writers described their westward journeys as affecting voyages in time as well as in space, which began in the bustling metropolis and progressed along the framework of railways and roads to the ends of the land.¹⁰ There was no agreed landmark that denoted the beginning of western terrain. As suggested by Eiluned and Peter Lewis, the anticipation and excitement associated with the west could impress itself on the traveller’s mind from as far away as London. Similarly, it was while visiting London that the Irish travel writers Somerville and Ross decided to escape the terrible weather for the Connemara mountains and the ‘glories’ of their native country.¹¹ Major cities also provided a plausible and convenient setting for the opening scenes of travel narratives, even if the enchantment of the west was not yet apparent. Nugent Robinson’s ‘A Dash Through Connemara’ (1881) began in the dining room of the Gresham Hotel in Dublin, and A. G. Bradley’s journey to north Wales (1898) began with a disagreement with the porter at London Paddington station about how to correctly pronounce ‘Shrewsbury’.¹² J. Ewing Ritchie escaped ‘the heat of a London summer’ for the Western Islands of Scotland, and Alexander Smith invited the reader to ‘leave London or Edinburgh, or whatever city your lot may happen to be cast in’, and accompany him to Skye.¹³ In this way, travel narratives mirrored the practical guidebooks, which suggested tours of western landscapes that began in major cities such as London, Dublin, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Once the traveller had departed, there was a wide variety of places and narrative devices that conveyed the allure of the west. Border regions such as Shropshire were significant spaces in which the westward gaze was enacted.¹⁴ For example, A. G. Bradley began his book *In Praise of North Wales* (1926) by remembering when, at the age of seven, he ‘stood on the top of a Shropshire hill’, and ‘dim shapes of, to me, strange and weird contour rose high upon the far western horizon. My hostess told me that they were the Welsh mountains’.¹⁵ H. V. Morton – who articulated the westward gaze in several of his travel books – employed the same motif as he approached Wales through the Border Marches. Passing through a landscape of ‘gentle hills’ to Ludlow, Morton’s mind turned ‘again to Wales’. He stopped at Ludlow Castle, climbed up to a sentry walk and, ‘gazing through an arrow-slit, saw far off to the westward the blue hills of

Wales'.¹⁶ Morton relished being in 'the wildness of a No Man's Land between two countries', and his anticipation was repaid when he entered Wales on 'a morning of sheer enchantment'.¹⁷ Shropshire's liminality – a region caught between England and Wales – was the point at which travellers began to perceive changes in their surroundings, and their sense of familiarity and certainty began to wane.¹⁸ Even travellers for whom Shropshire was the destination felt drawn to the western horizon. In a BBC radio programme called 'The Welsh Marches', S. P. B. Mais climbed the Stiperstones and gazed westwards towards 'the dim outlines of the cones and peaks and ridges of the Welsh mountains'.¹⁹ Mais repeated the westward gaze later in the programme when, after ascending the Long Mynd, he 'got a superb view away to the west over the dim pastureland of Shropshire below to the high mountains of Central Wales in the blue mist behind the sinking sun'.²⁰ 'The Welsh Marches' was printed, together with several other travelogues, in a book called *This Unknown Island* (1922), and a photograph accompanying this chapter placed the reader on the Wrekin, looking west towards the peaks Aran Fawddwy and Aran Benllyn in the distance.²¹

Descriptions of anticipation and enchantment also characterised journeys to Skye. There were several routes to choose from, but many travellers followed in the footsteps of Samuel Johnson, who began his *Journey to the Western Highlands* in Edinburgh and approached the Hebrides from Inverness.²² Johnson's itinerary was roughly replicated by Morton, who felt he had left 'the rich Highlands' behind and entered 'a wilderness of rock' on the road from Fort Augustus to Fort William. At this point, the supernatural allure of Skye was perceptible:

I could, it seemed, smell the sea at last; and those dim hills to the westward must be the mountains of the Isle of Skye. There is a queer magic in these gaunt hills. It is the strange unearthliness of the west coast of Ireland ... the strange rocks that rise up from moors might be enchanted men, and there is something supernatural even in the grouse that bang up from the moor and settle gracefully behind the next stone wall.²³

Seton Gordon also recognised what he described as the 'almost fairy-like beauty' of the 'phantom-like' Cuillin when looking westwards from Lochalsh,²⁴ and for Mary Donaldson Skye was 'mysterious', 'shimmering', and 'unearthly'.²⁵ Geographically, Skye was located to the north as well as to the west of urban centres such as London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Oban, and its mixed Norse-Gaelic past makes it a place where the imagined geographies of 'north' and 'west' overlap. However, Skye was more commonly thought of as part of the 'Western Highlands and Islands' and, as such, unequivocally situated within the enchanted west.

The anticipation of going westwards compelled travellers to pause and consider what lay before them, and this motif was reproduced by travel writers in Connemara and Cornwall. When Michael Floyd reached Galway, he explained to his readers that:

all Connemara lies before you, with its brown hills and blue waters, its gorge-like valleys and tracts of boggy moorland; a region as wild and sparse in habitation as any in Ireland, and as beautiful as any in the world.²⁶

Similarly, upon reaching the River Tamar, Katherine Bates took stock of Cornwall, ‘that rocky promontory’ that ‘seems to belong more to the kingdom of the sea than to England’.²⁷ The Tamar was significant as a threshold that marked one of the points at which the traveller felt they had entered the west, and for many writers it marked a sharp boundary between England and what Bates called ‘the veritable Pixydom’.²⁸ Molly Hughes described the Royal Albert Bridge as the route by which ‘we leave “England”’ and enter ‘the country of the Celts’, and once the Tamar had been crossed ‘the difference between the rich Devon land and the ruder scenery of Cornwall, with its lonely little whitewashed cottages, can be immediately perceived’.²⁹ Variations of this formulation abound in travel narratives, including Havelock Ellis’s Tamar, which ‘divides from the rest of Great Britain an ancient land’, and Charles G. Harper’s description of ‘the Cornishman’ who ‘may be heard talking of “going to England,” when he intends crossing the Tamar’.³⁰

In Irish literature, the River Shannon symbolised a similar transition between the anglicised east and the mythic Celtic west.³¹ However, Harry Speight (writing under the name Johnnie Gray) was much further west when he noticed that the landscape began to change. Combining the stock images of poverty and beauty common to descriptions of the Irish west, Speight explained that from Balla ‘we caught sight of the beautiful Connemara mountains, growing ever more beautiful and distinct as we approached our journey’s end’, and west of Castlebar the countryside became ‘wild’ and ‘anything but inviting’.³² For Morton, too, the change in atmosphere occurred further west than the Shannon. Instead, it happened ‘suddenly’ when the traveller left Galway ‘due west by the coast road’ and entered a region ‘in which Progress – whatever we mean by it – has broken in vain against grey walls; it has been arrested by high hills and deep lakes to the east and by the sea on the west’.³³

In contrast to moments of sudden insight gained by crossing definitive thresholds, many travellers instead came to the gradual realisation that the west was different. In his introduction to the Cornish section of *Burrow’s Guide to Devon and Cornwall* (1921), the Cornish writer Arthur Quiller-Couch

described the effect of westward travel on the visitor. It began as ‘a vague feeling that it [Cornwall] differs somehow’, which eluded precise definition. The feeling is, he wrote:

more than the sum of many small impressions which on his way westward have accumulated until, as he pushes down the narrowing peninsula ... he suffers a curious apprehensive sense of drawing near to the end of all things. ‘The Land’s End’ – *finis terræ, finisterre* – has taken on a real meaning for him.³⁴

Once the edge of the land had been reached, the westward gaze extended across the sea and towards the horizon. No sooner had he gained a little elevation on the eight-mile stretch of road between Llanbedr and Barmouth, A. G. Bradley looked out over Cardigan Bay, at which point his thoughts turned to ‘the drowned country of Gwaelod’ beneath the sea.³⁵ Some travellers marvelled at clear, panoramic views of rocky headlands, islands and seascapes, but it was more common for them to revel in conditions of mist and haze and in the atmosphere of sunset and darkness, which helped to produce a sense of ambiguity and mystery that deepened the enchantment of the west.³⁶ In 1884, the novelist Dinah Craik wrote an evocative description of Land’s End in what her title claimed was an ‘unsentimental’ journey through Cornwall. She approached Land’s End when the day was ‘darkening’ and ‘a soft greyness began to creep over land and sea’. Combined with the sharp sea air, the conditions produced an atmosphere in which Craik’s nerves ‘were strung to the highest pitch of excitement’. After following her guide along a dangerous path, Craik stood ‘at the farthest point where footing is possible, gazing out upon that magnificent circle of sea which sweeps over the submerged “land of Lyonesse,” far, far away, into the wide Atlantic’.³⁷

Craik’s sense of wonder and mystery at the periphery was difficult to replicate for travellers who found themselves surrounded by day trippers, guides and the trappings of the tourism industry. For this reason, mist, rain and wind were highly valued for their ability to drive others away. As shown in this book’s opening vignette, it was the ‘furious winds’ and ‘rain and mist’ that enabled W. H. Hudson to find solitude at Land’s End, where ‘its associations, historical and mythical, exercised a strange power over me’.³⁸ Sidney Heath advised his readers not to go to Land’s End during the busy season because ‘health-seeking and somewhat noisy tourists’ disrupt the scene with ‘jarring notes of modernity’. Instead, Heath suggested that Land’s End should be seen ‘under the magic spell of a stormy sunset or a misty dawn’ when the sea heaves ‘with a deep and mysterious ground swell’. Such conditions were, Heath advised, of particular interest to ‘those who are fond of the legends and traditions of the past’.³⁹

Tourist crowds were less common in some areas of western Ireland, which provided more opportunities for effusive and uninterrupted descriptions of the westward gaze. In *A Holiday in Connemara* (1909), Stephen Gwynn described being ‘lured’ westward by the winding road that brought him to the dark fragments of a ruin, where he took in a view of the sunset and the ‘sombre’ peak of Mweelrea. However, Gwynn’s ‘glorious day’ at the Atlantic seaboard was eclipsed when his friends returned from a day trip to Clare Island and made him ‘almost envious’ with their description of the ‘pure enchantment’ they had witnessed. Gwynn concluded the chapter with an extract from his friend’s diary, which describes their view of the sunset from the steamer and is saturated with the language of ‘enchantment’, ‘intensity’, ‘delight’, ‘magic’ and ‘wonders’. Returning to Killary Harbour was to creep ‘out of fairyland, still dazed a little perhaps by the magical scenes we had witnessed, and our brains still confused by a plethora of vague and unriddled conjectures’.⁴⁰ J. A. MacCulloch was more specific about the ‘Celtic’ character of his conjectures on the Great North Road in Skye, where ‘there is always something mysterious and inviting in this road at which every step carries you farther westward’. For MacCulloch, ‘the charm of the Western Isles beckons you onward like the romantic magic of early Celtic poetry’, and, looking westwards to the Isle of Harris, the ‘soft haze on the distant hills beyond the sea invites you to explore their mysteries’.⁴¹

In these descriptive passages the influence of earlier writers such as Matthew Arnold is clear. In the opening paragraphs of *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), Arnold described visiting the popular north Wales sea-side town of Llandudno. Facing eastwards towards Liverpool, Arnold imagined ‘swarms’ issuing from ‘that Saxon hive’. They were the tourist crowd who made for the ‘attractive’ and charming eastern bay of the Great Orme. But Arnold wanted something more. For him, ‘the horizon wants mystery’, and for this he turned to the west, at which point ‘[e]verything is changed’. He described the ‘eternal softness and mild light of the west’, in which the mountains gradually faded away, ‘hill behind hill, in an aerial haze’. Towards the coast of ‘mystic Anglesey’ the sea ‘disappears one knows not whither’. It was at this point Arnold’s thoughts turned to the story of Llys Helig, ‘a sea-buried palace and realm’ off the coast of nearby Penmaenmawr.⁴²

The westward gaze was drenched in the language of mystery, magic and enchantment, and it thrived in the delicate and otherworldly conditions of mist, haze, sunset and darkness. In this sense, the westward gaze articulated the mysterious and ethereal atmosphere that characterises the Irish Mythological Cycle which, as Douglas Hyde explained in *A Literary History of Ireland* (1899), emanates ‘a shadowy sense of vagueness,

vastness, uncertainty'.⁴³ Similarly, in his essay on 'The Celtic Spirit in Literature' (1927), Havelock Ellis recognised the importance of the remote in Welsh tales such as 'The Dream of Macsen Wledig', and the power of the 'terrifying mist' in stories such as 'Geraint and Enid'. The remote and misty world of 'Celtic romance' explained the love for what the Scottish writer Fiona MacLeod called 'a rainbow-land ... the vague Land of Youth, the shadowy Land of Heart's desire'.⁴⁴

In the British context, gazing out to sea is often associated with the myths peddled by historians such as E. A. Freeman, J. A. Froude and J. R. Seely, who connected coastlines and seascapes to ideas of imperial destiny, exceptionalism and colonial expansion.⁴⁵ There is also an inward-looking perspective associated with the Dover cliffs which, as Paul Readman has shown, became an important emblem of 'a discrete sense of islandhood', separation from Europe and a distinctive landmark of homecoming.⁴⁶ The westward gaze was different because it sought the elusive and the ethereal – sunken lands that had been lost and intangible islands that could not be conquered or colonised. This perspective is conveyed by William Daniell's 'The Land's end, Cornwall' (1825), on the front cover of this book, which established a much-replicated image of rocky cliffs tumbling into the sea, drawing the viewer's gaze out towards the horizon.⁴⁷ In contrast to the Dover cliffs, which represented the familiarity of home, the westward gaze reached its climax at the land's end, the *finisterre*, which literally denoted the end of the land but also represented the border between the known world (the *ecumene*) and the unknown.⁴⁸ In the remainder of this chapter and in the following chapter, the discussion moves beyond the general articulations of mystery and enchantment associated with the westward gaze, and focuses in turn on four sites of modern enchantment: Hy Brasil, Tír na nÓg, Cantre'r Gwaelod and Lyonesse.

Hy Brasil

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, readers and travellers encountered stories of an elusive and enchanted island called Hy Brasil. Occasionally visible from the western coastline but always tantalisingly beyond reach, Hy Brasil is a phantom island that was believed to exist somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, typically off the west coast of Ireland. The island was associated with tales of overseas voyages from Irish mythology, the setting sun in the west and historical accounts of people who claimed to have seen or even visited the island. This version of Hy Brasil was made up of many layers, the earliest of which was cartographical. From the mid-fourteenth century, the island appeared on

Genoese and Catalan portolan charts as, or in variations of, *insula de brazile*, when merchants and navigators explored the Atlantic. The creators of nautical charts inherited classical ideas about the western seas as mysterious and populated by islands such as the Hesperides, the Elysian Fields and Plato's sunken continent of Atlantis.⁴⁹ Hy Brasil and its variations featured on nautical maps until 1865, and was marked 'Brasil Rock' in John Purdy's *Chart of the Atlantic Ocean* (1835) and in Alexander G. Findlay's revised edition (1861), which noted that the islet's existence 'has been doubted', but included an eyewitness account of the island by the company and master of an English merchant ship from 1791.⁵⁰

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Hy Brasil became a literary setting with symbolic and allegorical value in fictional works such as Richard Head's *O-Brazile, or, The Incharnted Island* (1675) and the purported eyewitness account of William Hogg published as *The History of the Incharnted-Island of O'Brazile* (1724). Hy Brasil also appeared in satirical pamphlets such as Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), serving as a literary device that allowed writers to explore themes such as delusion, deception and that which is unattainable.⁵¹

The location of otherworlds in the west, towards the setting sun, is a common feature of Celtic mythology. However, nowhere in the medieval textual sources of Irish or Welsh mythology is Hy Brasil named as one of the Celtic otherworlds. The association between Hy Brasil and Irish mythology is an invention of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Hy Brasil became thoroughly Gaelicised. This process began with William Beauford who, in 'The Ancient Topography of Ireland' (1786), took O'Brasile (the contracted form of *insula de brazile*) and, following phonetic spelling conventions used to anglicise Irish names, translated the Romance definite article 'O' as 'Hy', giving the impression that the name had a Gaelic root.⁵² Beauford described 'Hy Brasail' as 'the enchanted island, the paradise of the pagan Irish', which was connected to 'a number of romantic stories' and, according to the inhabitants of Arranmore, might still be spotted on a clear day.⁵³ Despite criticisms from contemporary antiquarians such as Charles O'Connor, John O'Donovan and James Hardiman, Beauford's spelling and description of 'Hy Brasail' were reprinted in William W. Seward's *Topographica Hibernica* (1797), and perpetuated by John T. O'Flaherty's Royal Irish Academy lecture on the Aran Islands in 1824,⁵⁴ while Beauford's Gaelic etymology for Hy Brasil was developed in later texts such as Reverend Denis O'Donoghue's *Brendaniana* (1893).⁵⁵

Despite his criticism of Beauford, the connection between Hy Brasil and Irish mythology was strengthened by Hardiman. In *Irish Minstrelsy* (1831), Hardiman cited an unpublished 1636 manuscript called *History of Ireland*, in which 'O'Brasile' is situated off the west coast of Connacht and named

as a refuge of the Tuatha Dé Danann, who fled following their defeat by the Milesians.⁵⁶ Hardiman also edited the 1846 publication of *A Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught* (1684), in which Roderic O'Flaherty describes 'O'Brasil' as an 'enchanted island' that could be seen from the Aran Islands.⁵⁷ It is important to note that historians have failed to locate the original manuscripts for the unpublished *History of Ireland* and O'Flaherty's *Chorographical Description*.⁵⁸ Moreover, Hardiman and subsequent writers treated Richard Head's fictional pamphlet *O'Brazile* (1675) as fact. Nevertheless, Hardiman's references to these manuscripts shaped discussions of Hy Brasil in influential travel accounts such as Caesar Otway's *A Tour in Connaught* (1839) and Mr and Mrs Hall's *Ireland* (1841–3), which reinforced the connection between Hy Brasil and Irish mythology.⁵⁹

The Gaelicised Hy Brasil was adopted by poets such as Gerald Griffin, Thomas Moore and the Young Irelander Denis Florence MacCarthy, whose work helped to cultivate the idea of a mythic Irish west in the nineteenth century. In MacCarthy's 'The Voyage of Saint Brendan' (1848), 'Hy Brasail' is the 'Eden of the western wave' and became the destination of the sea-faring hero-saint,⁶⁰ and in the early twentieth century the folklorist and archaeologist William Gregory Wood-Martin described the island as 'one of the elysiums of the primitive Irish' in his book *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland* (1901).⁶¹ For Charles Squire, in *The Mythology of the British Islands* (1905), Hy Brasil was the 'paradise over-seas', which he placed alongside Tír na nÓg as one of the Celtic otherworlds situated in an 'unknowable island of the west'.⁶²

Travellers and travel writers inherited a composite idea of Hy Brasil, which combined cartographic descriptions of a tangible yet frustratingly elusive island with antiquarian, literary and folkloric portrayals of an otherworldly realm of Irish tradition. Travel literature grounded references to Hy Brasil in the western extremities of Ireland, especially the Aran Islands and Achill Island, and encouraged travellers to look westward for signs of the phantom island. In these passages, the tone was typically playful or ironic, and writers interrupted their sentences with remarks that activated the imaginative and sceptical faculties of the reader, who could suspend disbelief and enjoy a self-conscious indulgence in Hy Brasil. Murray's and Black's guidebooks, for example, described the viewpoint from Croaghnaun on Achill Island stretching across the sea, beyond which the nearest land would be America, 'unless we believe' in the enchanted island Hy Brasil.⁶³ This technique was replicated by Stephen Gwynn, who described the view from the steam-yacht as it left Blacksod Bay and passed the Achill cliffs on its way to Clew Bay in *The Charm of Ireland* (1934). Everything was hazy, imprecise and ethereal, from the 'faint shadow' of Croagh Patrick and the



Figure 2.1 Jack B. Yeats, *A Race in Hy Brazil*, 1937. Collection Crawford Art Gallery, Cork. © Estate of Jack B. Yeats. All rights reserved, DACS 2025.

‘ghosts of mountains’ inland, to the sea of ‘rippled silver’ in the west, ‘dancing and sparkling in the sunshine’. From here, the eye ‘travelled outward and onward to Hy Brasil, if you chose, or to Ireland overseas’.⁶⁴ No less effective was the light and perhaps ironic tone of W. B. Yeats, who in *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) explained matter-of-factly that a fisherman from Drumcliff saw Hy Brasil on the horizon, while the Irish novelist Frank Mathew employed a dry sense of humour when he remarked that several people in western Ireland had ‘convinced me that they were convinced’ that Hy Brasil was out there somewhere.⁶⁵

Conditions of haze, mist and clouds provided a sense of ambiguity that was exploited by a self-described ‘casual visitor’ to Rosses Point (Sligo) in 1908, who looked towards the setting sun and saw ‘a solitary, shadowy-crimson-ringed object’, which was ‘perhaps a cloud’ or ‘maybe hy-Brazil’.⁶⁶ The vague meeting place of sea, land and sky was conveyed by the soft blue tones of Paul Henry’s painting ‘Clare Island from Achill’ (1915), which a contemporary reviewer described as a ‘dream-like vision’, depicting the Knockmore cliffs rising out of the ‘halcyon sea’ as ‘glamorous as the fabled isle of Hy Brazil’.⁶⁷ Later in the period, Jack B. Yeats’s ‘A Race in Hy Brazil’ (1937) situated the viewer on the island itself, with vivid colours, bold expressive brush strokes and an alluring horizon that in its imprecision

suggests the elusive and ethereal nature of Hy Brasil (see [Figure 2.1](#)).⁶⁸ However, in keeping with the generally light tone of travel writing, the casual visitor's moment of apparent affect at Rosses Point was undercut by the rest of the article, which discussed more quotidian matters such as the quality of the accommodation, the golf links and the need for a pier.⁶⁹

Aside from the land and seascapes of western Ireland, there was a variety of other locations that invoked Hy Brasil. For the traveller 'J. M.', the Long Island (the Outer Hebrides) as seen from the Scottish mainland was 'a veritable Hy Brasil' that was 'set gloriously afire' by the sunset, and the American travel writer Harold Speakman was passing Lough Neagh on the road from Antrim to Dublin when he looked upon a scene of 'blue, misty shores' as 'tender' as the phantom isle.⁷⁰ Looking for Hy Brasil was an important part of the westward gaze, but this orientation was reversed for writers such as John Mitchel, who was located on the other side of the Atlantic after being convicted of libel and transported to Bermuda in 1848. Stephen Gwynn quoted extracts from Mitchel's *Jail Journal* (1854) in a 1907 lecture, in which Mitchel described finding momentary escape from his imprisonment by looking north-eastwards and remembering Ireland, which had become 'that green Hy Brasil of my dreams and memories'.⁷¹

Guidebooks embellished their descriptions of Hy Brasil with quotations from poems such as Gerald Griffin's 'The Isle of the Blest' and Thomas Moore's 'Oh! Arranmore, Loved Arranmore', celebrating the wondrous visions of earthly paradise while omitting the more sombre concluding messages of the poems. *Murray's Handbook for Ireland* favoured the opening lines of Griffin's poem:

On the ocean that hollows the rocks where ye dwell
A shadowy land has appeared, as they tell;
Men thought it a region of sunshine and rest,
And they call'd it O'Brazil, the isle of the blest.⁷²

The poem propagated the idea that Hy Brasil was a pagan Irish paradise, influencing later literary works such as Thomas D'Arcy McGee's 'The Voyage of Eman Oge' and William Larminie's 'The Finding of Hy Brasil', and Yeats included 'The Isle of the Blest' in his *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888).⁷³ Guidebooks included Griffin's suggestive imagery of the elusive 'shadowy land' of sunshine, rest and 'the blest', but omitted the poem's warning that a fanciful dreamland should not be sought after.⁷⁴ The warning is directed at the 'Rash dreamer' who bartered his 'calm life of labour and peace' for a futile 'vision of fanciful bliss':

The warning of reason was spoken in vain;
He never revisited Aran again!

Night fell on the deep, amidst tempest and spray,
And he died on the waters, away, far away!⁷⁵

Similarly, *Black's* guidebooks offered excerpts from Thomas Moore's poem 'Oh! Arranmore, Loved Arranmore' in the section on the Aran Islands, including the opening lines of the final verse:

That Eden, where the immortal brave
Dwell in a land serene, –
Whose bowers beyond the shining wave,
At sunset oft are seen.⁷⁶

The excerpts in *Black's* guidebooks included the speaker's search for the paradise of the 'dreaming poets', but the closing lines, which build on the central theme of regret, are omitted, and the reader is spared the futility expressed by the poem's speaker, who could never recapture the 'bliss' of 'those sweeter days' of youth:

Ah! dream too full of sadd'ning truth!
Those mansions o'er the main
Are like the hopes I built in youth, –
As sunny and as vain!⁷⁷

While there were some travel texts that conveyed the message of futility and regret associated with Hy Brasil, these themes are much more noticeable in political discourse.⁷⁸ This is particularly apparent in discussions of Irish emigration, which, according to the novelist Rosa Mulholland, caused exiles to 'pine' for an idealised home of 'fairy-like hills and dales' and 'enchanted rivulets'. Emigrants, she continued, tell their children stories of a romanticised Ireland that exists 'no more than does the Hy-Brasil', and when they visit Ireland the dream is shattered by scenes of 'broken cabins', 'unmended causeways' and the squalor and vice of the cities.⁷⁹ The act of leaving Ireland was also described as a voyage to Hy Brasil, begun with 'hearts so light and hopes so high' and, as the *Drogheda Independent* put it in 1904, doomed to end in 'hard work and a condition bordering on slavery'.⁸⁰ In fact, Hy Brasil was reached for in discussions of all the major political developments of the period. The *Dublin Weekly Nation* claimed that the landlords' 'grasp on the nation' was disappearing just like Hy Brasil in the wake of the Plan of Campaign and Balfour's Land Law (Ireland) Act 1887, and a letter printed in *The People* in 1889 accused critics of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill of being unhappy with 'anything short of turning Ireland into a new Hy Brazil'.⁸¹ The nationalist leader and agrarian campaigner William O'Brien drew laughter from the crowd during a rousing nationalist speech made at a United Irish League demonstration in

1899 when he suggested that the redistribution of land in Connacht was now a matter of 'practical politics' whereas a couple of years previously it was considered as 'visionary' as the phantom island, which 'everyone wished for and nobody ever saw'.⁸² Later in the period, in 1917, the writer of an article in the *East Galway Democrat* preferred the parliamentary work of John Redmond to the abstentionism of De Valera and Sinn Féin, whose aim of an Irish republic was deemed 'as illusory as the fabled island'.⁸³ David Lloyd George's promise of 'peace and plenty' was also subject to comparison with the elusive Hy Brasil in the aftermath of the Great War, and during the Irish Civil War an article in the *Dublin Evening Telegraph* remarked that 'the nearer we get to peace in Ireland the father away we get from it'. The article concluded with a parody of Gerald Griffin's poem, in which the 'shadowy hope' is not an elusive island but 'a promise of peace', which is within sight 'Till a land mine explosion destroys it one day'.⁸⁴

There was another, self-consciously rational, strand of engagement with Hy Brasil, which looked to geology, glacial theory, physics and the catastrophic submergence of oceanic islands as a means of rationalising and explaining sightings and cartographic representations of Hy Brasil. Rather than a tool for dismissal or disenchantment, rational and sceptical deduction instead revealed there were reasons to take the phantom island seriously. The re-enchanting effect of scientific inquiry is palpable in an entertaining lecture delivered to the Royal Geological Society of Ireland by Donegal County Surveyor William Harte in 1867. Harte admitted that the legend of Hy Brasil 'partakes in a high degree of the fictitious as well as the marvellous', and commented sardonically on the derivative nature of eyewitness accounts when he remarked that it was never possible to speak to 'the man that saw the man' who had seen the island. Nevertheless, Harte combined the fantastical with the rational, and was tantalised by the idea that the legend of Hy Brasil was 'not a mere invention', but a tradition 'springing out of physical facts'. Harte proposed that, as the Ice Age ended, huge icebergs from the great northern ice drift met land glaciers along the western coast of Ireland, allowing human hunters to chase bear, reindeer and other Arctic fauna across the ice and out to sea. The story of a disappearing land, then, grew out of the hunter's dismal experience of seeing these hunting grounds 'sink from his view forever', and Harte concluded 'with I think some reason' that there were 'facts in the fairyland tradition', and 'perhaps we have a glacial origin for our legend'.⁸⁵

Rationalisation also took place between readers of *Notes and Queries*, a magazine established in 1849 to facilitate correspondence between members of the reading public. On 22 September 1883, a contributor called

Mr Marshall submitted a query about Hy Brasil, drawing attention to seventeenth-century documents such as O’Flaherty’s *Chorographical Description* and suggesting that the ‘enchanted island’ had not yet ‘received notice’ in the magazine.⁸⁶ By December, Marshall’s query had three responses. The bookseller and antiquarian Thomas Kerslake provided two quotations from William Worcester mentioning ‘insula Brasyle’, and an answer from ‘N’ focused on Hardiman’s sources, including the *Unpublished History* and Richard Head’s *O’Brazile* (1675).⁸⁷ The surgeon and council member of the Royal Irish Academy William Frazer also replied, arguing that ‘an island must have existed at a very recent period where the Porcupine Bank is now known to be placed’.⁸⁸ The Porcupine Bank is a raised portion of the Atlantic seabed, named after its discovery by the HMS Porcupine in 1862 while searching for the best route for laying the first Atlantic telegraph cable. Restating the argument he made in a paper read to the Geological Society of Ireland in 1879, Frazer highlighted a map drawn in 1640 by the Geographer Royal of France, Sieur Tassin. Frazer believed the map to be accurate because it was made by a ‘skilful Geographer’ who relied on his own knowledge and on the testimony of trustworthy sailors who traversed the Atlantic Ocean. Furthermore, claimed Frazer, George Henry Kinahan had written about evidence of human habitation ‘below low water of Spring tides’ on the Aran Islands in his *Manual of the Geology of Ireland* (1878) which, along with evidence of submerged bogs along Ireland’s west coast, led Frazer to conclude that Brasil must have been above water at a time that ‘cannot have been very remote’.⁸⁹ In his response to Marshall, Frazer also provided extracts from a letter sent to him by the geologist Professor William King of Queen’s College Galway.⁹⁰ King drew attention to specimens of *Littorina littorea* (the common periwinkle) dredged from the surface of the Porcupine Bank. Given that this shellfish ‘lives between ordinary tide marks’ and requires exposure on rocky surfaces for its survival, King suggested that the Porcupine Bank was once ‘a shallow littoral beach’ adjacent to an island.⁹¹ The association between Hy Brasil and the Porcupine Bank was repeated by Wood-Martin in his *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland* (1901), who quoted Thomas Henry Huxley’s essay ‘On the Methods and Results of Ethnology’ (1865), in which the eminent biologist speculated that ‘there must be half-a-dozen Atlantises beneath the waves of the various oceans of the world’.⁹²

Furthermore, contemporary reports of dramatic and destructive events lent further credence to the idea that there might be an underlying truth to legends of sunken lands and disappearing islands. In 1930, the *Evening Herald* reported on the ongoing emergence and submergence of volcanic islands in the Malay Archipelago following the eruption of Krakatoa in

1883. This process recalled the Portuguese island of Port Alexander, which sank off the west coast of Africa in 1925, leaving behind nothing but wreckage and 'scores of bodies'. Following this report, the article outlined several legends of lost lands, including Hy Brasil, without further comment. The proximity of these stories to recent, tangible and catastrophic events made it more difficult to dismiss the idea of a vanished island called Hy Brasil.⁹³ Similarly, Frazer's own experiences watching the erosion of cliffs on the Isle of Wight, and the destruction of the shoreline at Bray during the previous winter's storms, convinced him it was certainly possible that the 'strong breakers of the Atlantic' combined with a general process of subsidence had destroyed much of Brasil island since the creation of Tassin's map.⁹⁴ Less dramatic, but equally indicative of the 'state of uncertainty' about the oceans, was a discussion held at the June 1926 meeting of The Anchorites, a group established in 1919 for the discussion of matters relating to ships and shipping. At the meeting, Lieutenant-Commander R. T. Gould's lecture on 'Mystery Islands' was read, and it claimed that even 'in these days of over-civilisation', a 'small departure from the beaten track' could transform the 'ordinary sailor into a discoverer'. This was laid bare by the 'discovery' a few years earlier that the Belcher Islands in Hudson Bay were larger than previously thought. Much of Gould's lecture was dedicated to the Pacific and South Atlantic regions, but he noted the similar position of Hy Brasil and the Porcupine Bank, and concluded tentatively that 'an island searched for unsuccessfully for many years may after all be found to be a very concrete reality'.⁹⁵

The most popular explanation for the legend of Hy Brasil was that it was an optical illusion. The Irish antiquarian Thomas J. Westropp articulated this position in his 1912 lecture to the Royal Irish Academy, 'Brasil and the Legendary Islands of the North Atlantic'. For Westropp, the tradition of an island called Hy Brasil was the product of a mirage or cloud bank combined with the setting sun and the 'keenly intelligent' and 'poetical' early inhabitants of Ireland, who 'stood on the western coasts face to face with phenomena of mystery and might' and saw what they thought was a floating island.⁹⁶ As a folklorist and archaeologist, Wood-Martin brought together tradition and scientific observation and stretched the explanatory limits of the optical illusion thesis. Indeed, according to Wood-Martin, the study of folklore was in 'the ranks of science' because although it granted latitude to the imagination it was also based 'on ascertained facts'. What he proposed were not definite assertions but 'deductions' and 'tentative' theories that are 'subject to modification', with the aim of overcoming 'obscurity'.⁹⁷ Having established his approach, Wood-Martin proposed that the phantom island Hy Brasil might be explained as a *Fata Morgana* – a mirage that can make objects below the horizon visible from the shore, or

make objects on the horizon appear bigger, closer or even suspended in the air.⁹⁸ And it was not just Hy Brasil that could be explained in this way. For Wood-Martin, the mysterious fleet of ships seen by a young James Hardiman in 1798 was in fact an ‘aerial phenomenon’ (Hardiman’s term) caused by Admiral John Borlase Warren’s fleet, which was pursuing a French squadron off the Irish coast after it had failed to land troops in support of the Irish Rebellion. By the same reasoning, Wood-Martin suggested that records of ‘fantastical ships’ seen from Galway harbour in 1161 might have been a fleet of Viking war galleys, and visions of Hy Brasil might be explained as ‘optical illusions’ of the Porcupine Bank, which ‘may represent the site of the now phantom land’.⁹⁹

An abridged version of this explanation can be found in guidebooks and travel writing throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Black’s* and *Murray’s* guidebooks explained succinctly that there is ‘some truth’ in sightings of Hy Brasil because ‘some sunken land may, in the rays of the setting sun, appear as an island’.¹⁰⁰ J. L. Cloud used this for dramatic effect when, during his visit to the Aran Islands, he glanced out to sea and saw ‘a bank of clouds’ that ‘looked like land’. Confused, because ‘in that direction the nearest land was America’, Cloud soon remembered that ‘from these cliffs the famous Hy Brazil was said to have been seen’.¹⁰¹ An article in the *Derry Journal* in 1885 claimed that the work of Scottish physicist David Brewster and other scientists of optics explained subjective visual phenomena by way of the refraction of light and therefore broke the enchantment of Hy Brasil.¹⁰² But after a widely reported sighting of an ‘Atlantic Mirage’ from the Connemara coast in 1908, the *Galway Observer* suggested that many people in the ‘crowd of witnesses’ no longer regarded Hy Brasil as an ‘imaginative story from the region of fables’.¹⁰³

Westropp experienced this type of optical illusion as a boy in 1872 when, as the sun was setting, ‘a dark island suddenly appeared far out to sea’. Since then, he had seen other ‘apparent islands’ from the coastline of Clare in 1887 and Mayo in 1910.¹⁰⁴ Bringing together his own experiences with his knowledge of cartography, geology and the periwinkle shells on the Porcupine Bank, Westropp concluded that further scientific investigation was required before the ‘upheaval and submergence’ of an island could be denied.¹⁰⁵ A sense of inconclusiveness remained. In 1938, the *Belfast Telegraph* surveyed the ‘rebirth of interest’ in disappearing islands over the preceding decades, and suggested that rather than settling the question of a lost continent in the Atlantic, the replacement of ‘mythological and romantic’ description with ‘scientific examination’ had instead produced ‘solid reasons’ for ‘believing in the ancient continent’. Recent lectures delivered by the traveller Count Byron de Prorok and Colonel A.

Braghine's new book were examples of how the 'cold light of scientific examination' had kept Hy Brasil alive, 'awaiting substantiation or even disproof'.¹⁰⁶ In the end, Hy Brasil remained elusive, impossible to reach and yet difficult to fully explain away, and therein lay its power to evoke lively debate and to enchant travellers in the west.

Tír na nÓg

Tír na nÓg, the Land of Youth, is perhaps the best known of the otherworldly paradises in Irish mythology. There are several other names given to the mythological lands that exist beyond the mortal world, including Tír Tairngire (the Land of Promise), Mag Mell (the Plain of Happiness), Tír na mBeo (the Land of the Living), the Isles of the Blessed and, from the eighteenth century, the Gaelicised Hy Brasil.¹⁰⁷ Despite being an otherworldly island that occupies mythic time as well as mythic space, Tír na nÓg is typically situated to the west of Ireland or the Hebrides, towards the setting sun. It is the land of the forever young, where there is no decay or pain, and the setting of an island in the west is a pervasive feature of Celtic mythology, symbolising remoteness, paradise, joy and death.¹⁰⁸

Tír na nÓg, and the otherworld more generally, appears frequently in the stories of Irish tradition as the abode of the supernatural Tuatha Dé Danann. The tales of the Mythological Cycle describe how the Tuatha Dé Danann were defeated by the mortal Milesians (who represent the Gaels) and were forced to leave Ireland. Many retreated into the *sídhe*, underground realms of splendour located beneath barrows or hillocks, while others travelled across the sea to Tír na nÓg under the leadership of the sea god Manannán mac Lir.¹⁰⁹ As Charles Squire put it in *The Mythology of the British Islands* (1905), this was an 'unknown, and, except for favoured mortals, unknowable island of the west', and the mythical stories focus on the movement of supernatural characters and 'favoured mortals' between world and otherworld.¹¹⁰

Several of these tales are categorised as the Fianna, Fenian or Ossianic Cycle, which are set in the third century and describe the exploits of Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warriors, the Fianna. Fionn mac Cumhaill's son, Oisín, is taken to Tír na nÓg by Niamh in the story 'Oisín in Tír na nÓg', and King Cormac mac Airt passes through a thick mist on his journey to the otherworld in 'Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise'. The otherworld also features prominently in the *Eachtraí* (adventure tales) such as 'The Voyage of Bran' and 'The Adventure of Connla', and in *Immrama* (sea voyages) such as 'The Voyage of Máel Dúin'. The otherworldly sea voyage is combined with Christian tradition in 'The Voyage of St Brendan', in

which the hero-saint journeys across the Atlantic to the Isle of the Blessed.¹¹¹ Island otherworlds in the west appear in other mythologies, too, but in the west of Ireland, situated on the fringe of Europe, this is an especially arresting and potent combination.¹¹²

The literary history of Tír na nÓg in the modern period can be traced back to the Irish language poem *Laoi Oisín ar Thír na nÓg* (the Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth), which was published in 1750 by Micheál Coimín. From the late eighteenth century, Anglophone antiquarians and folklorists became increasingly interested in the Irish language and in translating the extant manuscripts of Irish mythology into English.¹¹³ However, perhaps the most influential body of work was produced by James Macpherson, whose *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands* (1760), *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763) became known collectively as *The Poems of Ossian*. Claiming that these publications were translations of an ancient epic written by a Caledonian poet called Ossian (the anglicised form of Oisín), Macpherson's work was in fact the combination of themes and contents drawn from Scottish Gaelic ballads and his own imagination. This sparked fierce debates about authenticity. *The Poems of Ossian* were criticised for appropriating Irish mythology and were labelled forgeries by contemporaries such as Samuel Johnson and the Irish surgeon and historian Sylvester O'Halloran, who discussed what he called Macpherson's 'disingenuity' in his *Introduction to the Study of the History and Antiquities of Ireland* (1772).¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Ossian's epic counted Goethe, Napoleon, Blake and Byron among its defenders, and played an influential role in the emergence of modern nationalisms across Europe.¹¹⁵

Some travel writers waded into the Ossian debate, and Alexander Smith came out in firm support of Ossian's authenticity. For Smith, Macpherson was never more than a 'somewhat free translator', and any visitor to the Quiraing landslip on Skye would leave believing 'the misty and spectral Ossian to be authentic'.¹¹⁶ Mary Donaldson hinted at Macpherson's considerable contribution to the ancient epic when she emphasised that it was 'his Ossian', but it was more common for the subject to be avoided.¹¹⁷ Miltoun and Mansfield, for instance, quoted O'Halloran's summary of 'Oisín in Tír na nÓg' in full, but managed to steer clear of the Ossian debate by omitting O'Halloran's distrustful remark, aimed at Macpherson, from the beginning of the passage.¹¹⁸ Burton E. Stevenson also withdrew from the debate in his *Charm of Ireland* (1914), noting evasively that '[f]act and fancy have been so mingled in the Ossianic legend that it is impossible to disentangle them, nor is it profitable to try'.¹¹⁹

In the nineteenth century, Irish mythology was gradually popularised in collections such as William Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830) and *Tales of Ireland* (1834), and in 1859 Brian O'Looney's

translation of Coimín's *Lay of Oisín* was published in the *Transactions of the Ossianic Society*.¹²⁰ This gathered pace later in the century, following the publication of Irish scholar Eugene O'Curry's lectures on the manuscripts, chronicles and stories of Irish mythology in his influential *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (1873). The work of O'Curry and other Celtic scholars such as Kuno Meyer, Standish Hayes O'Grady and Whitley Stokes shaped the many translations and adaptations of the stories published by writers of the Irish Literary Revival. The novelist (and cousin of Hayes O'Grady) Standish James O'Grady followed his *The History of Ireland: The Heroic Period* (1878–80) with the novels *Finn and His Companions* (1892) and *The Coming of Cuculain* (1894), and Eleanor Hull offered her own rendition of *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature* in 1898. Douglas Hyde's *A Literary History of Ireland* (1899) and his retellings of myths under the pseudonym An Craoibhín Aoibhinn influenced the folklorist Lady Augusta Gregory, who published English translations of the Irish sagas in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902) and *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904). Hyde and James O'Grady also influenced W. B. Yeats, whose *Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889) was followed by many poems and plays that drew on Irish mythology. This wave of literary rediscovery also inspired writers beyond Ireland. T. Gwynn Jones's dramatic Welsh language poem 'Tír na n-Óg' (1916) popularised the Irish Land of Youth in early twentieth-century Wales, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson published the poem 'The Voyage of Maeldune' in 1892, although when contemplating Tír na nÓg travel writers and folklorists often preferred to quote Tennyson's description of Avalon in 'Morte d'Arthur', 'Where falls not hail, nor rain, nor any snow'.¹²¹

Along with the literary developments described above, Irish mythology also had a broader presence in Irish culture. Around the turn of the twentieth century Tír na nÓg was the name of an annual fete in Roscommon,¹²² a debating club in Belfast connected to the Gaelic League,¹²³ a society offering Irish language classes in Dublin¹²⁴ and a hurling team that competed in the County Antrim Championship.¹²⁵ D. P. Moran famously argued that Irish nationhood depended on the rediscovery of its cultural heritage, and popular involvement in this project was organised by newly established societies, including the Gaelic Athletic Association from 1884 and the Gaelic League from 1893.¹²⁶ The broad project of reviving a distinctive national culture for Ireland led in many directions, one of which was as a foundation for political rebellion. The stories of Irish mythology and themes of fighting, heroism and self-sacrifice were injected with nationalist messages by poets such as Alice Milligan and Thomas Boyd, and at the very least names such as Tír na nÓg, Cú Chulainn and Oisín could provide a mystical, hazy, golden quality for thinly veiled messages of rebellion.¹²⁷ In 1906, an article in the *Fermanagh Herald* remembered the Manchester

Martyrs of 1867, and used Tír na nÓg as a metaphor for the paradise of Ireland beyond ‘the bonds and chains of serfdom’, which could only be attained through ‘the noblest and most enduring acts of patriotism and self-sacrifice’.¹²⁸ Such adaptations of Irish mythology shaped the thinking of the Easter Rising leaders Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett, and after publishing *Celtic Wonder Tales* (1910) the poet Ella Young supported the rising as a member of the paramilitary group Cumann na mBan. As Martin Williams put it, Irish mythology ‘gave an epic quality to the whole national struggle’, and this connection only became more explicit after 1916.¹²⁹

Travel writers were receptive to the vibrant literary context described above, and drew on it when offering their own renditions, commentaries and summaries of mythological stories. Typically, references to mythology were triggered by the landscapes and seascapes of the west. Gazing westwards from the edge of the land prompted passing references to what Francis Miltoun and Blanche McManus Mansfield described as ‘the “Enchanted Isles”’, situated north-west of Achill Island, in *Romantic Ireland* (1904).¹³⁰ Likewise, Mary Banim drew the reader’s line of sight over ‘the first islands of Connemara’, followed by the Aran Islands, ‘Hy Brazil, the Land of the Blest, and Tir-na-n-Oge, the Land of Youth; and then – America!’¹³¹

This chapter, however, focuses primarily on the particularly strong associations between mythological heroes such as Cú Chulainn, the otherworld Tír na nÓg and the western landscapes of Skye. Kenneth MacRae explained these connections in his *Handbook and Guide to the ‘Misty Isle’ of Skye* (1921). In line with the story ‘Tochmarc Emire’ (The Wooing of Emer),¹³² MacRae explained that the hero of the Ulster Cycle, Cú Chulainn, travelled to Dunscaith Castle – ‘one of the most ancient castles in the Hebrides’ – to complete his training under the tutelage of Scáthach, or the Queen of Skye, the famous warrior and teacher. This task was set by Forgall Manach of Lusca as a means of preventing Cú Chulainn from marrying his daughter, Emer. Scáthach was ‘learned in all the arts of war and the chase’ and ‘knew the ocean route to Tir-nan-Oig, the paradise of the Celtic mythology’. According to MacRae, Cú Chulainn would stand on the castle battlements and ‘often gaze towards the setting sun to get a glimpse of “Irt” or “Iort”, the gateway to the Land of Eternal Youth’.¹³³ In contrast, Mary Donaldson’s visit to Dunscaith was shaped by Macpherson’s Ossian, in which Cú Chulainn leaves Skye and his wife, Bragela (who is based on Emer), for Ireland. In this version, it is Bragela, ‘leaning on her rock’, who looks westwards and listens in vain for Cú Chulainn and ‘the sound of thy distant harp’, who ‘will never return’.¹³⁴

The other popular association between Skye and Cú Chulainn was in the name of the Cuillin mountains, often spelled ‘Cuchullin’ in connection

with the hero.¹³⁵ This was one theory for the etymology of Cuillin, but it was a contested one. Despite being struck by their ‘unearthly’ appearance in the sunshine, Mary Donaldson was clear that the Cuillin range ‘is *not* called after the Celtic hero’ and was a name, ‘like many another, invented by guide books’.¹³⁶ Donaldson’s dismissal of the association rested not just on linguistic evidence but on her own knowledge of the mythology, too. When Cú Chulainn was in Skye to complete his training, he was required to cross a ‘bridge of cliffs’ that were ‘as narrow as the hair of one’s head, as slippery as the eel of the river, and as steep and high as the mast of a ship’. The legendary Cú Chulainn achieved this feat, of course, but Donaldson was not so easily convinced that such a challenge could have been completed in Skye:

When evidence of the existence of such a bridge of cliffs in Skye (or, for the matter of that, anywhere else) is forthcoming, then we may believe it was called after the super-Blondin who so successfully negotiated it!¹³⁷

Donaldson’s tone is typical of the playful, humorous and lively forms of engagement with mythology that characterised travel writing across the period. Similarly, while dismissing the association between Tír na nÓg and two rocky islets, Fladda-chùain and Holm Island, MacCulloch remarked that this was merely an example of Irish legends being ‘adapted to Highland localities’, and added wryly that ‘[m]uch fairy glamour would be needed’ to see these islets as ‘the Land of Immortal Youth!’¹³⁸ In both instances, Donaldson and MacCulloch retained a sense of detachment from the mythological associations, indulging in them temporarily and enjoying their imaginative and localised connections with Skye while conveying amusement at apparent signs of inauthenticity.

Travel writers also used the familiar conventions of storytelling to signpost an immersive yet conscious form of indulgence in mythological tales. Before recounting the stories of Ossian, Cú Chulainn and Diarmuid told to him by his companion Mr M’Ian, Alexander Smith’s preamble bore all the hallmarks of the storyteller. ‘Dwellers in cities’ usually laughed when they heard ghost stories, explained Smith, but ‘the blood should run chill’ in Skye, which is ‘steeped in a ghostly atmosphere’. Skye is a ‘weird and uncanny’ place, ‘haunted of legends’, where men are ‘gifted with the second sight’, and as Smith and Mr M’Ian sat down on the ruined stairs of Dunscaith Castle overlooking Loch Eishort, ‘a great white vapour’ flowed down from the Cuillin peaks. The scene well and truly set, Smith concluded: ‘The old gentleman was the narrator, and the legend goes as follows’.¹³⁹ Robert Lynd produced a more detached mood in *Rambles in Ireland* (1912) by providing his own rendition of the dialogue between Oisín and St Patrick, after Oisín returned from Tír na nÓg to find Ireland

Christianised. The meeting represented an encounter, a ‘running duel’, between the ‘golden youth of Paganism’ and the ‘grave and terrible sanctity’ of Christianity, and Lynd’s dialogue is injected with humour, in which Oisín’s ‘pagan common sense’ produces witty retorts before he ultimately submits to baptism. ‘Obviously’, observed Lynd, ‘it was Oisín of the battles and not Patrick of the prayers who was surrounded with a divine light in the hearts of the tale-maker who invented this’.¹⁴⁰

Another commonly used device was the qualifying remark, which followed or interrupted a story like a punchline. During his story of the miraculous Fairy Flag, J. J. Bell related how the MacLeod chief of Dunvegan married a fairy and then reassured his readers that ‘[s]uch a union need hardly astonish us’ because this ‘took place’ in the days when water horses were common and ‘men frequently held converse with mermaids’.¹⁴¹ In Ireland, J. M. Synge directed his qualifying remark at a Kerry storyteller, an old man who pointed out places of interest on their way to see the races. The storyteller indicated places connected to stories of Diarmuid, and then gestured to ‘a neck of sand where, he said, Oisín was called away to the Tír-na-nÓg’. After telling a further story about two men who got caught out at sea, one of whom miraculously saw Tír na nÓg under the water, Synge undercut the man’s narratives at the beginning of the following paragraph, with the dry remark: ‘Then he began telling me stories of mermaids – a common subject in this neighbourhood’.¹⁴² H. V. Morton’s storyteller was more complicit in generating a humorous tone at Lough Leane, in Killarney. The boatman told the story of the O’Donoghue who, ‘in ancient times’, dived into the lake and ‘entered that Land of eternal Youth which, as every one knows, lies beneath Killarney’. The stock character of the yarn-spinning host soon emerged, as the boatman continued:

‘And when the boatmen reach the age of sixty,’ explains the boatman with his eyes on the American girls, ‘we push thim in the lake, and, bedad, they come back to us at the age of eighteen! Mike, here, came back last week . . .’¹⁴³

The use of humour was not confined to travel writing, and in 1913 the fictional MP for Tír na nÓg appeared in a satirical article in *The Irish Citizen* on the subject of the franchise. At a debate in the Parliament of Amazonia, Mrs Kendrickson and Miss Evenson, the members for Tír na nÓg and Hy Brasil respectively, argued in favour of extending the franchise to ‘male property-owners over twenty-one years of age’ and to husbands of women already entitled to vote. The Prime Minister Mrs Balquith, however, spoke against the idea.¹⁴⁴

Also on the playful side of the spectrum, David MacBrayne commercialised the associations between the Hebrides and Tír na nÓg by including

'The Isles of Youth' in the title of their steamer guidebook for 1938, describing the 'craving for some island far out on the rim' where 'dreams come true'. The key ingredient here was the fact that Tír na nÓg was a place of mythic time, which caused the melancholic conclusion to the story 'Oisín in Tír na nÓg'. Having spent what he thought was a short and happy time with Niamh in the Land of Youth, Oisín returned to Ireland to find that 300 years had passed, and the Fenian warriors, along with his father Fionn mac Cumhaill, were long dead. In a selective reading of the story, the steamer guidebook repeated the suggestion of the eternal, timeless land of happiness in the opening passage, in which the Scottish playwright Donald R. MacLaren wrote that 'the measures of clocks and calendars will not trammel you', because 'these are the ISLES OF YOUTH'.¹⁴⁵ In the same way that the poems of Griffin and Moore were quoted selectively for their romantic descriptions of Hy Brasil, MacBrayne's guidebooks offered to the traveller the images of timelessness, eternal youth, happiness and bliss, without referencing Oisín's tragic return home to find his friends and family long gone. In this passage, the Hebrides have become the Isles of Youth themselves, accessible on the screw steamer Fingal, where the visitor will feel refreshed and renewed in a manner reminiscent of the stories of Tír na nÓg, where there is no ageing or decay.

Finally, there were also spiritual and philosophical responses to Irish mythology, and to Tír na nÓg specifically. In 1896, the Welsh-Cornish literary scholar and author Arthur Symons accompanied W. B. Yeats on a visit to the Aran Islands. As they reached the edge of Inis Mór and looked across the Atlantic from 'this last shivering remnant of Europe', Symons commented 'it was with no feeling of surprise' they learned from their guide that 'no later than two years ago an old woman of those parts had seen, somewhere on this side of the horizon, the blessed island of Tiran-Ogue'. At this point, Symons experienced a spiritual awakening at the edge. Looking over the cliffs, the sea became 'the magic mirror that glittered there like a crystal ... hesitating on the veiled threshold of visions'. Having seen Aran and Sligo in such conditions, Symons no longer doubted that 'the Irish peasant still sees fairies about his path, and that the boundaries of what we call the real, and of what is for us the unseen, are vague to him'. This was the effect of the landscape, which 'has in it more of the twilight' where land, sea, and sky 'mingle more absolutely than on any other coast'.¹⁴⁶ Symons's powerful passage ends with the declaration:

I have never believed less in the reality of the visible world, in the importance of all we are most serious about. One seems to wash off the dust of cities, the dust of beliefs, the dust of incredulities.¹⁴⁷

The intensity of Symons's contemplation is in keeping with the some of the ideas about Celtic literature expressed by Yeats in an essay written the following year. For Yeats, Celtic literature brought a 'vivifying spirit' to European culture because it was 'flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times'. The so-called 'natural magic' of the Celt was, for Yeats:

the ancient religion of the world, the ancient worship of nature and that troubled ecstasy before her, that certainty of all beautiful places being haunted, which it brought into men's minds.¹⁴⁸

Overlooking 'that mysterious region of the sea', Symons did not mock the old woman for her tale of having seen Tír na nÓg on the horizon. Neither did he undercut Irish mythology, otherworldly visions and local folklore with ironic or humorous remarks. Instead, Symons allowed himself to be arrested by the powerfully affecting landscapes of the edge, fully giving himself up to, to return to Landy and Saler's phrase, a 'quasi-mystical union' with something larger than himself.

The next chapter continues the present discussion by considering how the sunken lands Cantre'r Gwaelod and Lyonesse elicited a similar range of responses.

Notes

1. M. Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review', *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006), 692–716.
2. Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', 155.
3. Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', 138–9.
4. J. Landy and M. Saler, 'Introduction: The Varieties of Modern Enchantment', in *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, ed. J. Landy and M. Saler (Stanford, CA, 2009), 1–14, at 2.
5. Landy and Saler, 'Varieties of Modern Enchantment', 1–14.
6. M. Saler, "'Clap if You Believe in Sherlock Holmes": Mass Culture and the Re-enchantment of Modernity, c.1890-c.1940', *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (2003), 599–622, quotations at 606–7.
7. Landy and Saler, 'Varieties of Modern Enchantment', 1–2.
8. A similar range of responses, from 'playful entertainment' and 'mischievousness' to 'philosophical and artistic contemplation' and 'creative inspiration', are identified by Julia Mannherz in *Modern Occultism in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), 3–4.
9. E. Lewis and P. Lewis, *The Land of Wales* (London, 1937), 1–2.
10. There were also instances when travellers moved from west to east. The American tourists Lucy Langdon Williams and Emma V. McLoughlin sailed to Ireland, after which they travelled eastwards across the coast of North Wales; see L. L. Williams and E. V. McLoughlin, *A Too Short Vacation* (Philadelphia, 1892), 52. Also see J. U. Higinbotham, *Three Weeks in the British Isles* (Chicago, 1911), 312.

11. Somerville and Ross, *Through Connemara* (1893), 1–4.
12. N. Robinson, 'A Dash through Connemara', *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* 11, no. 3 (March 1881), 279–86, at 279; A. G. Bradley, *Highways and Byways in North Wales* (London, 1898), 1–2.
13. J. Ritchie, *The Cruise of the Elena* (London, 1877), 3–4; Smith, *A Summer in Skye* (1885), 7.
14. Roddy, 'Literature of Shropshire'.
15. A. G. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (Boston, 1926), 1.
16. H. V. Morton, *In Search of Wales*, 9th edn (London, 1936 [1932]), 9.
17. Morton, *In Search of Wales*, 16–17.
18. Roddy, 'Literature of Shropshire'.
19. 'The Welsh Marches' was printed, along with sixteen other radio programmes, in S. P. B. Mais, *This Unknown Island* (London, 1922), 180.
20. Mais, *This Unknown Island*, 184.
21. Mais, *This Unknown Island*, between pages 188 and 189.
22. Johnson, *Western Isles of Scotland*, 1–2, 54, 72, 107; George Birkbeck Hill retraced Johnson's route in *Footsteps of Dr Johnson (Scotland)* (London, 1890).
23. H. V. Morton, *In Search of Scotland*, 4th edn (London, 1929 [1929]), 194.
24. S. Gordon, *Highways and Byways in the West Highlands* (London, 1935), 60. Later in the book, Gordon describes the 'ghostly' Cuillin 'on the far western horizon' from Loch Duich – see page 66.
25. M. E. M. Donaldson, *Wanderings in the Western Highlands and Islands*, 2nd edn (Paisley, 1923 [1920]), 105–6.
26. M. Floyd, *The Face of Ireland* (London, 1937), 60.
27. K. Bates, *From Gretna Green to Land's End: A Literary Journey in England* (London, 1908), 350.
28. Bates, *From Gretna Green to Land's End*, 350.
29. M. V. Hughes, *About England* (London, 1927), 21.
30. H. Ellis, 'The Men of Cornwall', *The New Century Review* 1, no. 4 (April 1897) 328–35, at 328; C. G. Harper, *The Cornish Coast (North)* (London, 1910), 1. Also see S. Heath, *The Cornish Riviera* (London, 1911), 6.
31. T. Cusack, *Riverscapes and National Identities* (Syracuse, NY, 2010), 158–89, especially 158–73.
32. Gray [Speight], *View of Ireland* (1885), 19.
33. H. V. Morton, *In Search of Ireland*, 7th edn (London, 1932 [1930]), 173.
34. Quiller-Couch, 'Introduction to Cornish Section' (1921), 101.
35. Bradley, *Highways and Byways in North Wales* (1898), 387–8.
36. For a detailed discussion of mist, see G. Roddy, 'Mist in "the West": Literatures of Travel and Landscape in the Western British-Irish Isles, c.1880–1940', in *Literary Tourism and the British Isles: History, Imagination, and the Politics of Place*, ed. L. Fletcher (Lanham, MD, 2019), 37–67.
37. D. Craik, *An Unsentimental Journey through Cornwall* (London, 1883), 113–15. Also see C. L. Hind, *Days in Cornwall* (London, 1907), 350.
38. Hudson, *Land's End* (1908), 58–9.
39. Heath, *Cornish Riviera* (1911), 40–42.

40. S. Gwynn, *A Holiday in Connemara* (New York, 1909), 192–5.
41. J. A. MacCulloch, *The Misty Isle of Skye* (Edinburgh, 1905), 56.
42. M. Arnold, *The Study of Celtic Literature* (London, 1900 [1867]), 1–3. For Renan, see E. Renan, ‘The Poetry of the Celtic Races’, in *The Poetry of the Celtic Races and Other Essays by Ernest Renan*, trans. W. G. Hutchinson (London, 1896), 1–60, at 1–2. The essay was originally published as ‘La poésie des races celtiques’, *Revue des Deux Mondes* 24, no. 5 (1854), 473–506.
43. D. Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland* (London, 1899), 293. This is also discussed in M. Williams, ‘Ancient Mythology and Revolutionary Ideology in Ireland, 1878–1916’, *The Historical Journal* 26, no. 2 (1983), 307–28, at 308.
44. H. Ellis, ‘The Celtic Spirit in Literature’, in *A Study of British Genius*, 2nd edn (London, 1927 [1904]), 217–19. Fiona MacLeod was the pseudonym of the Scottish writer William Sharp. Ellis was better known for his work as a sexologist.
45. C. F. Behrman, *Victorian Myths of the Sea* (Athens, OH, 1977).
46. Readman, *Storied Ground*, 25–51, quotation at 25; P. Readman, ‘“The Cliffs Are Not Cliffs”: The Cliffs of Dover and National Identities in Britain, c.1750–c.1950’, *History* 99, no. 335 (2014), 241–69, at 247–9, 255–6.
47. For examples of travel books replicating this view, see GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 60; A. Salmon, *Cornwall* (New York, 1925), facing 149; Bates, *Gretna Green to Land’s End* (1908), facing 376; S. Baring-Gould, *Cambridge County Geographies: Cornwall* (Cambridge, 1910), 41; *The Land’s End Country* (n.d. [1930]), front cover and facing page 4; *Penzance: The Gateway to the Land’s End District* (Penzance, 1921), front cover.
48. S. Roseman and N. Herrero, ‘Introduction’, in *The Tourism Imaginary and Pilgrimages to the Edges of the World*, ed. N. Herrero and S. Roseman (Bristol, 2015), 2–3.
49. B. Freitag, *Hy Brasil: The Metamorphosis of an Island* (Amsterdam, 2013), 3–6.
50. J. Purdy, *Memoir, Descriptive and Explanatory, to Accompany the New Chart of the Atlantic Ocean* (London, 1835), 359; A. G. Findlay, *Memoir, Descriptive and Explanatory, of the Northern Atlantic Ocean* (London, 1861), 665.
51. Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 153–7.
52. W. Beauford, ‘No. XI, The Ancient Topography of Ireland’, in C. Vallancy, *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. 3, part 1, no. XI (Dublin, 1786), 249–426. For a full explanation, see Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 215–16.
53. Beauford, ‘Ancient Topography of Ireland’ (1786), 282.
54. Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 219–20; W. Seward, *Topographica Hibernica* (1797); J. T. O’Flaherty, ‘A Sketch of the History and Antiquities of the Southern Islands of Aran, Lying off the West Coast of Ireland’, read 26 January 1824, *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 14 (1825), 79–140.
55. D. O’Donoghue, *Brendaniana: St Brendan the Voyager* (Dublin, 1893), 304n.
56. Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 61–2; J. Hardiman, *Irish Minstrelsy*, vol. 1 (London, 1831), 368.
57. Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 64; *A Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught: Written A.D. 1684, by Roderic O’Flaherty*, ed. J. Hardiman (Dublin, 1846), 68–9.
58. Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 61, 64.
59. C. Otway, *A Tour in Connaught: Comprising Sketches of Clonmacnoise, Joyce Country, and Achill* (Dublin, 1839), 387–90, 439–41; Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character, &c.* (3 vols) vol. 3 (London, 1843), 436–7.

60. The poem was first published in *Dublin University Magazine* in 1848, and then in D. F. MacCarthy, *Ballads, Poems, and Lyrics, Original and Translated* (Dublin, 1850), 71–108, quotation at 77. MacCarthy's source was Hardiman (see pages 363–4).
61. W. G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland* (2 vols), vol. 1 (London, 1901), 219.
62. C. Squire, *The Mythology of the British Islands* (London, 1905), 74.
63. *Murray's Ireland* (1878), 209. Also see *Black's Picturesque Tourist of Ireland*, 15th edn (Edinburgh, 1877), 301.
64. S. Gwynn, *The Charm of Ireland* (London, 1934), 124–5.
65. W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* (London, 1893), 144; F. Mathew, *Ireland* (London, 1905), 164. For discussion of Yeats's dry, light, and ironic tone, see E. Hirsch, 'Coming out into the Light: W. B. Yeats's "The Celtic Twilight" (1893, 1902)', *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 18, no. 1 (1981), 1–22.
66. "By the Sad Sea Waves". The Rosses Point. Notes by a Casual Visitor', *The Sligo Champion*, 4 July 1908, 8.
67. 'Connaught in Colour. Mr and Mrs Henry's Exhibition', *Northern Whig*, 15 March 1915, 9.
68. J. B. Yeats, *A Race in Hy Brazil* (painting, 1937).
69. 'By the Sad Sea Waves', 1908, 8.
70. J. M., 'East and West', *St James's Gazette*, 2 April 1901, 5; H. Speakman, *Here's Ireland* (New York, 1931 [1925]), 264.
71. 'John Mitchel, of Newry. Mr Stephen Gwynn, MP, Lectures in Town Hall', *Frontier Sentinel*, 9 February 1907, 8.
72. *Murray's Ireland* (1878), 187–8; Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), 237; Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), 246.
73. Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 212.
74. Freitag, *Hy Brasil*, 225–7.
75. W. B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (London, 1888), 212.
76. *Black's Picturesque Tourist of Ireland* (1877), 271; *Black's Tourist Guide to Ireland*, 19th edn (Edinburgh, 1885), 224. These lines were also included in M. D. Frazar, *Practical Guide to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 2, *Ireland and Scotland* (Boston, MA, 1909), 65.
77. T. Moore, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore* (London, 1841), vol. 4, 95–6.
78. Mathew, *Ireland* (1905), 164–5.
79. R. Mulholland, 'The Irish Exile's Home-sickness', *Supplement to the Wexford People*, 5 November 1892, 5.
80. 'The Greatest National Danger', *Drogheda Independent*, 26 March 1904, 4. Hy Brasil was also used as a metaphor to describe overseas opportunities that did in fact exist, as in the letter from John Studdart to the Sligo Board of Guardians persuading 'distressed people in Ireland' to emigrate to Minnesota, 'another Hy Brazil': 'Sligo Board of Guardians', *The Sligo Champion*, 17 January 1880, 3.
81. 'Right Gloriously', *Dublin Weekly Nation*, 28 January 1888, 8–9; 'M.P., letter to the editor', *The People*, 12 October 1889, 5.
82. 'The United Irish League. Demonstration at Claremorris. Speeches by the ven. arch-deacon Kilkenny, P.P., Mr Michael Davitt, MP, Mr William O'Brien, and Mr Conor O'Kelly', *Freeman's Journal*, 8 May 1899, 5–6.

83. 'Practical Work and Pursuit of Illusions', *East Galway Democrat*, 15 December 1917. Similar comments were made in 'Items of the Week', *Irish Weekly and Ulster Examiner*, 3 July 1920, 1.
84. 'The Problem of Prices', *The Derry Journal*, 7 July 1919, 2; 'Gossip of the Day. Sketches by "Cormac"', *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 20 March 1923, 3.
85. W. Harte, 'On the Post-Tertiary Geology (Recent and Post-Pliocene Phenomena) of the County of Donegal, and Part of the County of Derry, and its Connexion with that of Scotland', *Journal of the Royal Geological Society of Ireland* 2 (1871), 30–67, at 65–6.
86. 'O'Brazile', *Notes and Queries*, 22 September 1883, 6th ser., viii, 224.
87. 'O'Brazile or Hy Brazile', *Notes and Queries*, 15 December 1883, 6th ser., viii, 474–5.
88. 'O'Brazile or Hy Brazile', 475.
89. W. Frazer, 'On Hy Brasil, a Traditional Island off the West Coast of Ireland, Plotted in a MS. Map, Written by Sieur Tassin, Geographer Royal to Louis XIII', *Journal of the Royal Geological Society of Ireland* 15, pt. 3 (New Series), 1879–80 (Edinburgh, 1880), 128–31, at 128–30.
90. William King was better known for correctly identifying that the bones found in the Neanderthal valley belonged to a distinct species of human.
91. 'O'Brazile or Hy Brazile', 1883, 475.
92. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths* (1901), 212–13.
93. 'A Lost Island', *The Evening Herald*, 12 September 1930, 8.
94. Frazer, 'On Hy Brasil' (1880), 130–31.
95. 'Mystery Islands. How Navigators Are Misled', *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 3 June 1926, 9.
96. T. J. Westropp, 'Brasil and the Legendary Islands of the North Atlantic: Their History and Fable. A Contribution to the "Atlantis" Problem', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 30 (1912), 223–60, at 223–4.
97. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths* (1901), ix–x.
98. *Fata Morgana* is a mirage caused by a temperature inversion resulting in atmospheric refraction, where light bends as it passes through air of varying temperature (and thus varying density).
99. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths* (1901), 212–13, 215–16, 218. Also see *Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught, by Roderic O'Flaherty* (1846), 31–2.
100. Quotation from *Black's Ireland* (1877), 271. Similar comments made in Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), 235–6, 265; and Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), 246, 275. Also see *Black's Ireland* (1885), 223–4.
101. J. L. Cloud, 'The Arran Islands', *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (1880–1), 506–14, at 508.
102. 'The Legends and Superstitions of Northern Ulster', *The Derry Journal*, 9 February 1885, 7.
103. 'A Phantom City. Letter to the Editor', *The Spectator*, no. 4181, 15 August 1908, 231.
104. Westropp, 'Brasil and Legendary Islands', 257.
105. Westropp, 'Brasil and Legendary Islands', 246–7, 257–8.

106. 'Lost Atlantis', *Belfast Telegraph*, 28 December 1938, 8. In this article Hy Brasil is understood as the Celtic name for Atlantis.
107. Squire, *Mythology of the British Islands* (1905), 133–4. These names are often used interchangeably; see *Black's Ireland* (1877), 301 for use of Hy Brasil, 'Enchanted Island', Tír na nÓg, and 'the country of youth' in this manner. Hy Brasil was another name for Tír na nÓg in Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall, *Ireland, its Scenery, Character, &c.* (3 vols), vol. 1 (London, 1841), 394.
108. Avalon is the British equivalent: Squire, *Mythology of the British Islands* (1905), 133–4.
109. Squire, *Mythology of the British Islands*, 135–6.
110. Squire, *Mythology of the British Islands*, 133–4.
111. For a discussion of the symbolic significance of the island in the west, see Foster, 'Certain Set Apart', especially 262–3.
112. Foster, 'Certain Set Apart', 263. Wood-Martin commented on the connections between classical and Irish mythology in *Traces of the Elder Faiths* (1901), 219.
113. Many books, manuscripts, and entire libraries were destroyed between the onset of Viking raids in the late eighth century and the Battle of Clontarf (1014), so the principal manuscript sources of Irish mythology date from the eleventh century. They include *Lebor na hUidre* (The Book of the Dun Cow, c.1100), *Lebor Laignech* (The Book of Leinster, twelfth century), *Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502* (early to mid-twelfth century), as well as the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts *The Yellow Book of Lecan*, *The Great Book of Lecan* and *The Book of Ballymote*.
114. S. O'Halloran, *Introduction to the Study of the History and Antiquities of Ireland* (London, 1772), 309–33, 337–64.
115. C. Kidd and J. Coleman, 'Mythical Scotland', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, ed. T. Devine and J. Wormald (Oxford, 2012), 62–78, at 67–70; P. B. Ellis, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (London, 1987), 159–60. Also see C. O'Halloran, 'Irish Re-Creations of the Gaelic Past: The Challenge of Macpherson's *Ossian*', *Past and Present* 124 (1989), 69–95.
116. Smith, *Summer in Skye* (1885), 219, 232.
117. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 108–9.
118. F. Miltoun and B. M. Mansfield, *Romantic Ireland*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA, 1904), 165–6; for O'Halloran's comment, which clarified that the story was related by 'Ossine Mac Fion (but not Ossian)', see O'Halloran, *Antiquities of Ireland* (1772), 362–3.
119. B. E. Stevenson, *The Charm of Ireland* (New York, 1914), 494–5.
120. Ellis, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, 13.
121. For example, MacCulloch *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 44–5; Squire, *Mythology of the British Islands* (1905), 133. Tennyson borrowed this line, which is used to describe the Elysian Fields in *The Odyssey*.
122. 'Tir na n-Og', *Freeman's Journal*, 4 September 1897, 7.
123. 'The Irish Language Movement (From Information Supplied by the Gaelic League)', *Irish Independent*, 31 October 1900, 2.
124. 'Tir Na N-Og', *Carlow Nationalist*, 20 July 1901, 12.
125. 'Hurling. County Antrim Championship. Tir Na N-og v. Old Pioneers', *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 25 November 1901, 6.
126. Williams, 'Ancient Mythology and Revolutionary Ideology', 314.
127. Williams, 'Ancient Mythology and Revolutionary Ideology', 313–19.

128. 'The Manchester Martyrs. A Dreadful Sacrifice. Died for Ireland', *Fermanagh Herald*, 24 November 1906, 6.
129. Williams, 'Ancient Mythology and Revolutionary Ideology', 323.
130. Demonstrating how worldly and otherworldly islands overlapped, they counted Inishglora and Inishkea among their enchanted isles. Miltoun and Mansfield, *Romantic Ireland*, vol. 2 (1904), 165–6.
131. 'Through Ireland by Mary Banim', *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 31 August 1889, 8.
132. The story, told in the manuscripts *The Book of the Dun Cow* and *The Book of Leinster*, was translated by Kuno Meyer in 'The Wooing of Emer', *Archaeological Review* 1, no. 1–4 (London, 1888), 68–75, 150–5, 231–5, 298–307, and Meyer's version was retold in abridged form in E. Hull, *The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature* (London, 1898), 55–84.
133. MacRae, *Guide to Skye* (1921), 66.
134. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 108–9.
135. Alexander Smith enticed his readers to Skye where they might see 'the Cuchullin hills' and listen to 'a legend as old as Ossian' in *Summer in Skye* (1885), 7. This spelling is also used in David MacBrayne, *Summer Tours in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1889), 65, 69.
136. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 105. Donaldson suggests the name derives from the Gaelic word 'cuilinn' (cuileann), which means holly and refers to the shape of the jagged ridge.
137. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 105.
138. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 44–5, 45 n1.
139. Smith, *Summer in Skye* (1885), 158–60.
140. Lynd, *Rambles in Ireland* (1912), 307–8. This takes place when Lynd is in Dublin, which is also where the encounter between Oisín and St Patrick takes place.
141. J. J. Bell, *Scotland's Rainbow West* (London, 1933), 313–15.
142. J. M. Synge, *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara* (Dublin, 1911), 130–32.
143. Morton, *In Search of Ireland* (1932), 137.
144. 'Parliamentary Debate', *The Irish Citizen*, 9 August 1913, 92–3.
145. MacBrayne, *Royal Route* (1938), see title page and 2–3. This was characteristic of MacLaren's writing, who in his radio play 'The Isles of Youth' (broadcast in 1936) described Iona as a place where 'Time will seem to pause. In your heart you will hear the murmur of the ages': 'Clan Notes. From the Seanachaidh', *Daily Record and Mail*, 27 May 1936, 12.
146. A. Symons, *Cities and Sea Coasts and Islands* (London, 1918), 313–14.
147. Symons, *Cities and Sea Coasts and Islands*, 314.
148. W. B. Yeats, 'The Celtic Element in Literature' (1897), in W. B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil* (New York, 1903), 270–95, at 275, 290.

Chapter 3

The westward gaze – sunken lands

Flood myths are common to cultures around the world, and some of the best known include the flood in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Biblical Deluge and Plato's Atlantis. In north-western Europe, one of the most familiar sunken lands lies to the east of the British-Irish Isles. By the late nineteenth century it had long been recognised that the Dogger Bank, in the North Sea, was part of a land bridge that connected these isles with mainland Europe before the post-Glacial rise in sea level, and in the 1930s evidence was found confirming the presence of humans on the former landmass.¹ However, stories of sunken lands in the west left a more extensive cultural footprint in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² This chapter explores the fascination with two stories of sunken lands in the west – Cante'r Gwaelod and Lyonesse – which brought together medieval texts, folklore, modern literary adaptations, geology, archaeology and the tourism industry.

Alongside elusive islands, stories of sunken lands arrested travellers who gazed westwards from mountain-top and cliff-edge, and self-consciously rational and sceptical approaches to the stories produced a distinctive and modern sense of wonder. One way of thinking about modern enchantment is to highlight the importance of 'doubt', as Will Pooley does in a recent article on attitudes towards witchcraft in modern France. Pooley describes the power of 'enduring and unresolved uncertainties' that stemmed not from people's 'outright belief' in witchcraft but from their 'inability to entirely dismiss what they had encountered'. Drawing on the work of Linda Dégh, Pooley notes that legends and fairy tales do not necessarily indicate 'credulous expressions of faith in ghosts or monsters' but instead 'engage in dialectics of belief' and allow storytellers and their audiences 'to argue and express uncertainties'.³ The power of 'doubt' can

be applied to our understanding of the allure of sunken lands in the west, where geology and archaeology opened up space for ambiguity and enchantment that could not be closed off. This differs from Pooley's distinction between 'systematic' beliefs that can be 'taught, learned or explained' and 'dysfunctional' doubts that are 'insidious'.⁴ This chapter demonstrates that doubt could also be sparked by systematic research and explained in archaeology and geology journals and in travel writing in a manner that enchanted – and this was not necessarily a sinister process.

Cantre'r Gwaelod

The drowned kingdom of Cantre'r Gwaelod is a story associated with the inundation of land off the western coast of Wales between Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island) in the north and either Cardigan or Ramsey Island in the south, in what is now Cardigan Bay. The earliest written source for the story of Cantre'r Gwaelod is a poem from the thirteenth-century manuscript *Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin* (*The Black Book of Carmarthen*) called 'Boddi Maes Gwyddno' – the drowning of Gwyddno's plain.⁵ In the story, Seithenyn is the king of Cantre'r Gwaelod, a rich and fertile land that was flooded in the sixth century after the well-maiden, Mererid, neglected her duties and let in the waters.⁶ There is also a parallel inundation narrative of Helig ap Glannawg's kingdom, Tyno Helig, in Conwy Bay. The stories have influenced one another over time and may represent the same original narrative that has been localised around two traditional sixth-century individuals.⁷ In addition, the inundation narrative of Kêr Is, off the coast of Finistère in western Brittany, shares many similarities with the Welsh stories of submergence.⁸

In the sixteenth century a different version of the Cantre'r Gwaelod tale emerged, in which King Gwyddno Garanhir ruled over sixteen cities that were protected from the sea by an embankment and a system of gates, or sluices. In this version, Seithenyn is relegated to the role of the dyke-keeper, who in his drunkenness forgets his vital duties, and consequently the land is flooded and everyone but the king is drowned.⁹ This version was popularised in the nineteenth century by works such as T. J. Ll. Pritchard's poem 'The Land Beneath the Sea' (1823) and T. L. Peacock's novel *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829).¹⁰ The Cantre'r Gwaelod story also gave rise to the popular song 'Clychau Aberdyfi' ('The Bells of Aberdovey'), an eighteenth-century composition that was included in M. J. Williams's prize-winning collection of unpublished Welsh airs presented at the 1838 Abergavenny Eisteddfod.¹¹

Later in the century, Celticists such as John Rhŷs commented upon the different versions of the tale, but it was the second narrative that captured the attention of the wider public.¹² In guidebooks such as Ward Lock's *North Wales* (1912) and the *Blue Guides: Wales* (1922) it was the careless Seithenyn who neglected his duty in 'a fit of intoxication',¹³ and in *A Book of North Wales* (1903) Sabine Baring-Gould provided an excerpt of the poem attributed to Gwyddno, which included the lines:

Accursed be the sea-warden, who, after his carousal, let loose
the destroying fountain of the raging deep.

Accursed be the watcher, who, after drunken revelry, let loose
the fountain of the desolating sea.¹⁴

Beyond the guidebooks, Cantre'r Gwaelod was prominent in the artistic and intellectual lives of the Welsh people. For instance, the story provided subject matter for papers presented to the Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society in 1912, and for prize-winning songs at the eisteddfodau held in Merthyr in 1881 and Treorchy in 1928.¹⁵ David Owen, from Denbigh, won the Chair Prize at the 1908 Eisteddfod held in Barmouth for a poem based on the Cantre'r Gwaelod inundation, and a journalist from Aberystwyth called Dewi Morgan repeated the feat at Pwllheli in 1925.¹⁶ The tale of Cantre'r Gwaelod was adapted by Ernest Rhys and the Anglo-Irish poet Alfred Perceval Graves for the Harlech pageant in August 1920, when 200 actors performed the opening episode, 'The Great Sea Flood', in front of 5,000 spectators gathered in the castle.¹⁷ The performance was reprised in 1922, when the *Western Mail* praised the way the 'little maidens clad in green and silver' entered the stage with a 'dainty dance' to suggest the overwhelming sea, 'driving before them the terror-stricken women of the countryside'.¹⁸ More generally, a reference to Cantre'r Gwaelod could denote a metaphorical drowning, for instance, when a letter written in 1902 to the *South Wales Daily News* suggested that the Welsh language was being submerged beneath a wave of anglicisation, 'as was Cantre'r Gwaelod by the Atlantic'.¹⁹

For travellers and readers alike, the principal interest in Cantre'r Gwaelod lay in contemporary debates about the story's veracity. These debates tantalised the traveller with the possibility that the authenticity of the story was visible in the physical geography of the area. Along the west coast of Wales there are three sarns, or causeways, that project out into Cardigan Bay. In the north, Sarn Badrig (St Patrick's Causeway) runs about thirteen miles out to sea from the coast at Pensarn, between Harlech and Barmouth. The central Sarn y Bwch runs between four and five miles seaward from Tywyn, while the southern Sarn Cynfelyn projects eight

miles out to sea from Y Borth, just north of Aberystwyth, culminating in a group of rocks called *Caer Wyddno*.²⁰

For many observers the remarkably straight form of the sarns indicated human design, which meant that the causeways might represent tangible traces of the system of embankments and sluices that had protected *Cantre'r Gwaelod* from the sea. Capitalising on the physical evidence, newspaper articles enticed tourists to the seaside towns of western Wales with the promise that they might find 'traces of the legendary twelve walled cities' of *Cantre'r Gwaelod* for themselves.²¹ Travel writers were also intrigued by this prospect, and when A. G. Bradley looked down on Cardigan Bay from the coastal road he drew the reader's attention to the line of surf caused by *Sarn Badrig* just under the surface, one of *Cantre'r Gwaelod*'s 'artificial banks'. At certain times, explained Bradley, 'the wall itself' was visible, 'showing high and dry above the waves' and 'stretching for miles into the bay', while further south 'another mysterious wall of a similar kind' confirmed Bradley's assertion that 'in the reign of *Gwyddno Garanhir*, a fair land covered with villages spread out here'.²² The writer Maud Stawell seemed to undermine any earnest consideration of the *Cantre'r Gwaelod* story by beginning her retelling with a variation of the archetypal fairy tale opening: 'There was once a time very long ago, it is said, when all the bay that lies upon our right was a fertile plain, the Plain of *Gwaelod*'. However, the storyteller's lightness of touch was also grounded in the geography of Cardigan Bay, and Stawell proceeded to draw her reader's eyes seawards where, at low tide, 'you may sometimes see the long line of the broken dyke' that protected the 'fertile plain'.²³

Not everybody accepted that the sarns represented the remains of embankments and sluice gates. Several guidebooks reproduced the geologist A. C. Ramsay's conclusion that *Sarn y Bwch* was a 'sunken reef', which 'may indicate the continuation of the Cambrian rocks' out to sea.²⁴ Accordingly, *Black's Guide to North Wales* (1897) remarked that the sarns 'we would ascribe to nature rather than to man', and the *Gossiping Guide to Wales* (1902) reassured its readers that, despite the imaginative associations put forward by Welsh antiquaries, *Sarn Badrig* 'is now known to be a natural formation'.²⁵ But these dismissive comments were rare examples of certainty on the matter. It was more common for writers to draw attention to curious details, as the Canadian journalist Beckles Willson did in his book *Lost England* (1902). Willson pointed out that *Sarn Badrig*, when visible at low water, shelves to the south while it is steep to the north – exactly in the manner of a defensive sea wall.²⁶ Taking up a nuanced position, the geographer H. J. Fleure provided a geological explanation for the formation of the sarns, but concluded with the teasing line:

he would be a bold man who would definitely rule out the possibility of human work having contributed something to the form of these ‘sarns’ in the days when the lowland was still inhabited.²⁷

Likewise, Eiluned and Peter Lewis revelled in the lack of definitive answer when it came to the sarns in their evocative passage:

The sensible Saxon may stop his ears and refuse to hear the echo of ghostly bells on stormy nights, but even he cannot rule out the possibility of some drowned human effort when the spring tides uncover great ‘Sarns,’ or causeways, far out in Cardigan Bay.²⁸

Geological and archaeological research added fuel to speculation about the deep history of Cardigan Bay, and strengthened the sense that the Cantre'r Gwaelod story might be built on plausible foundations. In Britain and Ireland an understanding of ice-age conditions developed in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when the Swiss-American geologist Louis Agassiz introduced his glacial theory to William Buckland, Charles Lyell and the Geological Society of London.²⁹ Over the next century, geologists remained fascinated by the changing conditions around the British-Irish Isles from the end of the Pleistocene, when the ice began to retreat. As J. G. D. Clark explained in *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe* (1936), geologists had to contend with the interacting forces of eustatic sea-level rise, as water was released from the ice sheet, and isostatic rebound, where formerly depressed areas of the earth's crust recovered after the glacial weight was lifted.³⁰ Geologists generally agreed that significant and localised changes in the relative sea level had taken place since the end of the Pleistocene, but their understanding of the seabed and sunken lands remained limited. Moreover, the questions of precisely when marine transgression took place, its extent, and whether it was gradual or catastrophic in nature, remained open.

The geology and geography of Cardigan Bay attracted so much attention because the low tide exposed the roots and trunks of submerged forests. In ‘Geology of Aberystwyth’ (1878), Walter Keeping noted the two sets of red deer antlers discovered in the submarine clay bed near Borth, where there were also trunks and branches of oak, pine and beech indicating the old land surface.³¹ The press drew readers' attention to the visible remains of the ancient forests, too, and summarised lectures on the once ‘fertile plain’ that spanned Cardigan Bay.³² The sense of mystery lingered around sunken lands, so that by 1935 T. A. Glenn made essentially similar arguments to Keeping in an article for *Archaeologia Cambrensis*. Glenn drew attention to the submerged forests visible at low ebb from the Mersey to Cardiganshire and the seventy or more recent finds of prehistoric bronze,

stone, bone and shell, but admitted that the dates for the various periods of uplift and submergence remained 'yet to be worked out'.³³

As a result, when geologists and other captivated intellectuals turned their critical faculties to the legend of Cantre'r Gwaelod they could not simply dismiss it as mere fantasy. For the geologist William Boyd Dawkins, it was enough to sprinkle enticing references to Cantre'r Gwaelod in his books and speeches. In *Early Man in Britain* (1880), for instance, Dawkins analysed the geological evidence of land depression and suggested that it 'could not be less than from thirty to forty feet'. This would, of course, add a considerable amount of land to the surface of Britain, especially in Cardigan Bay, 'where the Welsh peasant still tells the story of the land swallowed by the sea'.³⁴ Others, however, subjected stories of sunken lands to more sustained analysis. In 1921, O. T. Jones, Professor of Geology at the University of Manchester, brought geological and archaeological evidence 'to bear upon these legends', to ascertain

whether there is anything in them beyond evidence of the fertile imagination and inventive ability of the Welsh and related Celtic peoples.³⁵

Jones explained that the geological record attests to 'a general sinking' of the southern parts of Britain and Ireland, 'proved especially by the submerged forests' at Borth, Barmouth and Tywyn. Various excavations during the construction of bridges and docks at Barry, Swansea and Barmouth revealed peat and trees up to sixty feet below the contemporary high-tide line, and the recovery of polished stone, bone and flint chips suggested that 'Neolithic man' – the 'ancestors of the present population of Wales' – once occupied the sunken lands.³⁶ Bringing the evidence together, Jones concluded:

It appears that the so-called fairy tales or folk tales of Wales deserve to be taken seriously, as they seem to have preserved for us by oral tradition past events in the history of the country and its people which would otherwise have been unrecorded.³⁷

Jones's position was shared by D. J. Davies, who regarded the 'glowing description' of Cantre'r Gwaelod as the 'poetic license' exercised by Welsh bards, but admitted that 'it is possible' the legend derived from Neolithic people who witnessed the submergence of southern Britain after the glacial epoch.³⁸ Discussions of Cantre'r Gwaelod were characterised by this sort of equivocal language, which left the legend open to interpretation. This position was articulated by the University of Cambridge botanist Harry Godwin, who remained unsure whether the legend was 'a genuine, if modified, folk memory of an actual catastrophe', or a tale inspired by the sight of a submerged landscape.³⁹ Either way, the inability of such

self-consciously rational and scientific minds to wholly dismiss the legend of Cantre'r Gwaelod produced a novel sense of curiosity, delight and wonder.

The earnest engagement with the story of Cantre'r Gwaelod and its landscape setting filtered into travel writing, popular history and the press. Writers of all kinds replicated the geologists' distinction between the imaginative details of the story and the deeper truths that it communicated. This approach is encapsulated in an exchange of letters in the *Manchester Times* published in 1893. In the 'Notes and Queries' section, W. A. Part asked whether the 'marvellous yarns' about sunken land told by his skipper during a voyage across Cardigan Bay had any substance to them, and a reply the following week stated that the existence of Sarn Badrig, supposedly 'a ruined sea wall', suggests that the yarns 'have no doubt some foundation in fact'.⁴⁰ The 'foundation in fact' explanation was repeated by Fleure in his introductory article in *The Blue Guide: Wales* (1922),⁴¹ and an 1888 article in the *Aberystwyth Observer* referred poetically to 'sermons in stones' that suggested the tradition 'is not entirely to be disregarded'.⁴² Similarly, in *A History of Wales* (1911), J. E. Lloyd suggested that the story might represent memories 'handed down through many generations' of a subsidence 'attested by geology',⁴³ and in the same year the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* cited the 'indications of submerged dwellings and roads', which showed that the tradition was 'evidently based on fact'.⁴⁴ In this case, even if the sarns were natural rock formations and there was no episode of drunken negligence in the Lowland Hundred, the story retained a foundation of truth that attested to historical human experience. This realisation was enchanting in its own right, and it relied on critical geological and archaeological inquiry.

Geological inquiry and travel writing came together in the pages of William Ashton's *Evolution of a Coast-Line* (1920), in which the author recalled his visit to Cardigan Bay in September 1910, when Sarn Badrig was revealed at the lowest tidal ebb (see [Figure 3.1](#)). Ashton was struck by the 'strong flavour of romance about the past of Cardigan Bay' but maintained that he was a 'critical enquirer' who resolved to 'proceed deductively' and carry out 'direct observation' to 'disentangle romance from fact'.⁴⁵ Marshalling the evidence of the traditional accounts, antiquaries, geologists, reports from local inhabitants and his own observations, Ashton advanced a series of arguments. First, combining geological knowledge of post-glacial subsidence in southern Britain with evidence provided by 'experienced observers' along the coast, Ashton argued that the subsidence was 'still in progress' at a rate of around three feet per century. This would account for forty-two feet of subsidence across fourteen centuries which, if reversed, would bring an area of land above the

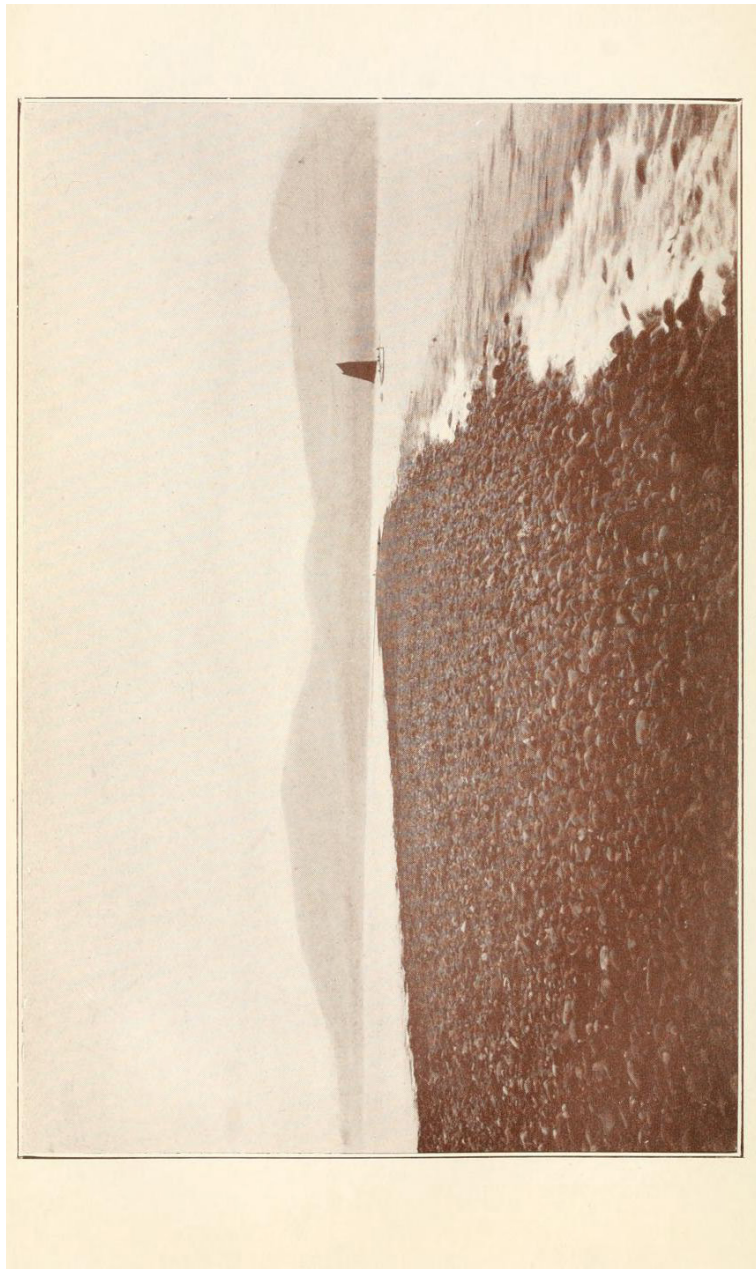


Figure 3-1 'Fig. 53 – Sarn Badrig at lowest tidal ebb of 1910. Looking N. E. 8 miles W. x N. W. of Barmouth', William Ashton, *The Evolution of a Coast-Line* (London, 1920), facing 268.

water corresponding ‘fairly well with that assigned to the lost Cantref Gwaelod’.⁴⁶

Second, Ashton accepted the conclusions of Professors Ramsay, J. R. Ainsworth and others that the sarns were naturally occurring at their foundation, and that tidal currents had covered them in stones, boulder-clay deposits and shingle.⁴⁷ However, after considering the historical precedent of embankments along the north German coast as well as Roman sea defences built in southern Britain and in Holland, Ashton surmised that ‘similar protection would be made on the subsiding Cardigan Bay coast’, and that ‘advantage would be taken of any lines of natural elevation upon which to erect such embankments’. This led Ashton to the conclusion that ‘embankments were once constructed on the natural rocky ridges of Cardigan Bay’.⁴⁸

Third, Ashton heard testimony given by Mr R. G. Humphreys from Porthmadog, who saw ‘a layer of 6 or 8 large oblong stones, as if part of a wall, near the south side of Sarn Badrig’, and Mr David Jones from Barmouth, who said that he found ‘stones with mortar adhering to them’ when dredging in six fathoms of water around six or seven miles from land opposite Dyffryn.⁴⁹ Bringing all of the evidence together, Ashton admitted that ‘we can hardly dismiss as unsupported legendary lore the tradition that the chief of the sixteen lowland towns, Caer Gwyddno, did once stand near the end of Sarn Cynfelin’.⁵⁰ So in the end, and despite Ashton’s efforts, ‘romance’ and ‘fact’ remained seductively intertwined.

The legend of Cantre’r Gwaelod entered the realm of public debate as contemporaries found new resonances in the account of lost land while witnessing destruction and flooding along their storm-battered and eroding coastlines. In north and west Wales the main railway lines were particularly vulnerable to storms and gales because they followed the coast for long stretches. In 1883 the railway embankment was breached at Barmouth, and along the Chester to Holyhead line Thomas Telford’s Stanley Embankment was partially washed away in 1887.⁵¹ In Pwllheli, a tramway used by tourists was damaged by a storm in 1896 and the same storm washed away the railway at Rhyl.⁵² There was a tragic incident in 1899 when the railway embankment collapsed between Conwy and Penmaenmawr, leaving the rails and sleepers intact but completely unsupported. An unsuspecting express goods train, travelling at night, crossed this section of track and tumbled into the sea, killing the driver and fireman.⁵³ Further destruction occurred at Rhyl in 1905 and again between Crickieth and Porthmadog in 1938, where a bridge collapsed shortly after a Great Western Railway train carrying sixty schoolchildren had crossed it.⁵⁴

The problem was partly caused by the infrastructure itself. Railway embankments caused coastal squeeze by preventing the natural

migration of vegetation across inter-tidal land. In consequence, salt-marshes became mudflats, and as the vegetation declined so did its baffling effect on the energy produced by waves.⁵⁵ The embankments therefore created the conditions for their own destruction, and the combined threats of storms and erosion endangered the railway lines, roads, promenades, accommodation, tramways and pavilions in rapidly expanding seaside towns which relied economically on the summer tourism traffic.

The frequency of such destructive events meant that sea defence and coastal erosion loomed large in the public consciousness, and the story of Cantre'r Gwaelod became a reference point for people across the country who raised concerns and demanded solutions. In 1896, a short article in the *South Wales Daily News* responded to the coastal erosion near Criccieth by asking '[a]re we going to have a second edition of [the] Cantre'r Gwaelod disaster?'"⁵⁶ The legend even carried weight for those on the other side of the country. In the same year, after coastal erosion forced the abandonment of a coastguard station near Sheerness in Kent, a report in the *Dover Express* recognised that legends of dwellings 'under the water of Cardigan Bay' need not be accepted 'in every particular' for people to acknowledge that they contained an 'element of truth' and conveyed the strong belief held by past societies 'in the overwhelming power of the ocean' – a power that was still 'going on before our eyes'.⁵⁷

In July 1906 a Royal Commission on Coast Erosion and Afforestation was appointed, chaired by Ivor Guest, 1st Viscount Wimborne, which brought together landowners, geologists, lawyers, and experts on sea defence with representatives of various government departments to investigate coastal erosion as a matter of national importance. This was welcome news to the people of Morfa Nefyn, a seaside town on the Llŷn Peninsula where the golf course and camping facilities were threatened by the encroaching sea. Moreover, according to a report in the *North Wales Weekly News* later that year, plans to extend the Colwyn Bay promenade were as much about improving the sea defences as about 'visitors' happiness', and it was said that Colwyn Bay Hotel had been much further inland in the past. The article explained that the threat of the sea 'is very real to us in Wales', and, after considering the warning contained in the legend of Cantre'r Gwaelod, wondered 'whether it is not possible that science has made sufficient progress by now' to 'rescue us from the inundation with which we are now threatened'.⁵⁸

The Royal Commission published its third and final report in 1911, which revealed the complexity of the problem without offering clear solutions. The report recommended that the Board of Trade be made responsible for sea defence and be given the power to control the removal of materials

from the shore, but, as the civil engineer J. S. Owens pointed out, it also revealed differences of opinion among members of the commission as well as the ‘paucity’ of knowledge regarding coastal erosion.⁵⁹ The report itself admitted that systematic observation of the coastlines was required because ‘the information at present is scanty and vague’, and concluded that erosion was a localised problem and not a national service.⁶⁰ It was clear that much remained to be done, and frustration at the lack of action in the following decades was expressed in a letter to the *Western Mail* in 1929, when T. Wynne Thomas of Aberdyfi warned that Cantre’r Gwaelod was lost ‘owing to the laxity of the then Government officials’.⁶¹ Contemporaries recognised Cantre’r Gwaelod as a legend conveying the general and pressing truth that coastlines are elastic, the forces of nature have destructive potential, and human habitation is precarious.

Lyonesse

The lost land of Lyonesse is a legendary country that is conventionally situated between Land’s End and the Scilly Isles. Various iterations of the inundation story describe how many villages and 140 churches in this fertile tract of land were submerged:

when the sea made a clean sweep of the country and rushed, with stupendous speed, across the flat wooded lands until it was brought to a halt by the massive cliffs of what is now the Land’s End peninsula.⁶²

In its modern form, the legend of Lyonesse is a combination of several separate flood traditions, information taken from manuscript sources, and modern literary adaptations, which together formed the popular and thoroughly commercialised tale that enchanted travellers and writers in Cornwall and the Scilly Isles.

Several strands of the Lyonesse legend are French in origin, including the late twelfth-century *Roman d’Aquin*, which contains an inundation story within its fictitious account of a campaign waged by Charlemagne against pagans in Brittany. Another early strand is the twelfth-century *Roman du Mont Saint-Michel*, which is a history of the titular abbey translated (with additions) into Norman dialect from Latin documents that contains an account of a submerged forest. Alongside the inundation narratives, the earliest appearance of the name ‘Lyonesse’ occurs in Geffrei Gaimar’s twelfth-century chronicle *Estoire des Engleis* (written in the 1130s), in which ‘Loeneis’ refers to Lothian, in Scotland. Variations of Loeneis appear in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts of Arthurian romance as the home of Tristram, and the name continued

to change over time as the stories became localised around Cornish and Breton places and entwined with local traditions. By the fifteenth century, Thomas Malory used the more recognisable forms 'Lyones' and 'Lyonesse' for the name of Tristram's country in *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1470).⁶³

Independent of Arthurian romance, medieval English chronicles described great inundations of the sea in an unspecified location. In the entry for November 1099, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* described how 'the sea-tide ran up so very high and did so much to harm as no one remembered that it ever before did',⁶⁴ and the *Chronicon ex chronicis* recorded that, in the same month, 'the sea overflowed the shore, destroying towns, and drowning many persons, and innumerable oxen and sheep'.⁶⁵ The first account of a specifically Cornish inundation appears in the *Itinerary* of William of Worcester (1415–82), who based his account of the submergence of land around St Michael's Mount on a manuscript that, Bivar suggests, was influenced by the *Roman du Mont Saint-Michel*. John Leland (c.1503–52) also described land between Penzance and Mousehole that had been 'devourid by the sea' in his *Itineraries* (c.1538–43) and noted the 'roots of trees in dyvers places' near the low water mark in *Collectanea* (1533–6).⁶⁶

These threads were woven together in the sixteenth century, when the name Lyonesse became attached to the tradition of a Cornish inundation in two influential chorographical works: Richard Carew's *Survey of Cornwall* (1602) and William Camden's *Britannia* (1586). Carew conflated the tradition of submerged land in Cornwall with the name 'Lionnesse', which he situated in the thirty miles between Land's End and the Scilly Isles.⁶⁷ Carew's *Survey* was published in the early seventeenth century but it was circulated in manuscript form beforehand, and likely influenced Camden's corresponding remarks about a land 'farther to the West' than Land's End, called 'Lionnesse'.⁶⁸ This was a key moment in the development of the legend because the status of Carew and Camden ensured that the location of Lyonesse between Land's End and the Scilly Isles was repeated uncritically by subsequent writers.⁶⁹

From the mid-nineteenth century, Lyonesse was popularised in literature that reworked Arthurian romance, such as Matthew Arnold's poem 'Tristram and Iseult' (1852) and especially Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859–85), in which Lyonesse is the setting for the final battle between Arthur and Mordred, a land that has risen from the sea and is 'to sink into the abyss again'.⁷⁰ The connection between Lyonesse and the south-west was strengthened after the publication of Walter Besant's *Armored of Lyonesse* (1890), a novel that placed the legendary country in the Scilly Isles. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Lyonesse was a useful setting that helped to convey themes of

remoteness and tragedy in the poetry, plays and novels of several writers including Algernon Charles Swinburne, Thomas Hardy, Arthur Quiller-Couch, Walter de la Mare and Mary Ellen Chase.⁷¹ Lyonesse recurs as part of Hardy's Wessex in several of his works, including in the poem 'When I set out for Lyonesse' (1870) where the speaker returns 'With magic in my eyes', and again in the novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) and the short story 'A Mere Interlude' (1885). Finally, a few years before his death, Hardy retold the story of Tristram and Iseult in the play *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall in Tintagel* (1923), a story of misfortune 'well suited to his genius', as one contemporary review put it, in which even the sea 'sighs mournfully at the foot of the castle wall'.⁷² The play was reworked the following year by Hardy and Rutland Boughton as a musical drama presented at the Glastonbury festival in 1924, and in 1936 Gerald Finzi set 'When I set out for Lyonesse' to music as part of his *Earth and Air and Rain* song cycle.

The Lyonesse story also circulated in stories of church bells being heard beneath the waves, and in the tale of the lone survivor – a man who escaped the inundation on his horse. This tradition existed in two versions, each associated with an ancient Cornish family. In the Trevelyan version, the survivor came ashore on a white horse at Perranuthnoe, which is why the family crest displays a white horse emerging from the sea. In the Vyvyan version, the survivor rode ashore somewhere near St Buryan, and for this reason the Vyvyan family crest also depicts a horse. In 1921, the leader of the Cornish language revival Henry Jenner claimed that 'until very recently', according to Sir Vyell Vyvyan, the family kept a horse 'ready saddled and bridled' in the stable at Trelowarren 'in case it [an inundation] should ever happen again'.⁷³

Unsurprisingly, the widespread cultural presence of Lyonesse shaped the traveller's experience at the Cornish coast. Travel writing combined and repackaged these sources so that the traveller gazing westward from Land's End would, like Sidney Heath, 'think instinctively of the lost land of Lyonesse'.⁷⁴ W. Fordyce Clark also thought of Lyonesse 'instinctively' on his approach to St Michael's Mount, where he felt 'conscious of a sense of enchantment which is not easily shaken off'.⁷⁵ It was the 'raw edge' of Land's End that arrested the imagination of the novelist Geraldine Mitton, where she and many other writers quoted Tennyson's description of Arthur's fight against Mordred:

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their Lord.⁷⁶

Alongside its literary purchase, the Cornish tourism industry was quick to seize the Lyonesse legend and make it a distinctly Cornish tale. In 1889, the passenger steamer *Lyonesse* began plying between Penzance and the Scilly Isles, crossing daily during the busy summer season. The steamer proved very popular with Scillonians and tourists alike, and frequently took over a hundred, and sometimes several hundred, excursionists on day trips from Penzance.⁷⁷ The association was reinforced by guidebook titles such as *Faire Lyonesse: A Guide to the Isles of Scilly* (1897) and *Lyonesse: A Handbook for the Isles of Scilly* (1900), and *Lyonesse* was also used for the name of a hotel on St Mary's, as well as for the island's cricket team. This was part of a broader claim over Arthurian legend, which also had strong connections with places in the English–Scottish borderlands and in Wales, but was most thoroughly exploited by the Cornish tourism industry.⁷⁸ As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the Southern and Great Western Railways made *Lyonesse* part of their marketing strategies, and Cornwall is drenched in Arthurian associations in J. P. Sayer's Great Western Railway poster-map 'Land of Legend, History and Romance' (1934). The viewer's eye is caught by storied locations such as Tintagel ('Birthplace of Arthur'), Dozmary Pool ('into which "Excalibur" is said to have been cast'), St Kew ('Trysting place of Tristram & Iseult'), and Goss Moor ('where King Arthur hunted'), culminating in the steamer route from Penzance which disappears off the western edge of the map, where 'the sea covers the fabled land of Lyonesse'. The poster, which takes the form of an open book, is crammed with symbols, including the Cornish and the Great Western Railway coat of arms, and the bright colours and cartoon illustrations reflect the jovial and playful tone of the poster, in which Arthurian romance and the legend of *Lyonesse* rub shoulders with information about bathing beaches, golf courses and the region's pilchard exports, as well as brief notes on historical events such as the Civil Wars and the failed invasion attempt of the Spanish Armada.⁷⁹ The Great Western Railway also designated the west *Legend Land* in a series of leaflets, in which George Basil Barham – under the pseudonym 'Lyonesse' – reworked 'old tales' told in the western parts of Britain served by the railway. 'The Lost Land of Lyonesse' was included in the second volume, which makes an appeal to the traveller in search of 'truth mingled with the old legends' as well as those looking for the 'perfect place for a lazy holiday' just 'six-and-a-half hours from Paddington'.⁸⁰ The leaflets were well received, and they combined illustrations and descriptions of legendary lore with practical tips for visitors, while the map on the back page connected the stories' locations with the Great Western Railway network.⁸¹

One response to the cultivation of an unashamedly commercialised Lyonesse was sober scepticism such as that adopted by J. C. Tonkin and Prescott Row, who signposted their transition from a passage on Lyonesse to a section on the Phoenicians, Romans and Anglo-Saxons as a move away from ‘charming stories of romance’ and towards ‘the facts of cold history’.⁸² Similarly, J. Henry Harris refused to be taken in by the Lyonesse story when he visited Land’s End, insisting that, whatever the traveller reads or hears, ‘[t]he fact remains that from Land’s End to Scilly is blue water’, and everyone who stands on the cliffs of Land’s End ‘turns his face seawards, and says, “There’s nothing between me and America”’.⁸³ Even the Great Western Railway saw no difficulty in refashioning Lyonesse into a marketing tool while simultaneously insisting to readers that the legend was ‘groundless’.⁸⁴ The Cornish writer Walter H. Tregellas was far more aggressive in his rejection of the Lyonesse tradition, and wished to mention the story only ‘to consign it to oblivion’.⁸⁵ A similarly sceptical argument was made in an article about Lundy Island in the *Exeter Flying Post*, which claimed the idea that the island might be another relic of Lyonesse was confined to geologists whose ‘poetical instincts are more vivid than their scientific consciousness’.⁸⁶

Another mode of engaging with the Lyonesse legend was much more akin to the travel writer’s use of storytelling conventions when indulging playfully in the mythical land Tír na nÓg. One point of similarity was the use of qualifying remarks in an introductory sentence, which served as a signal for the reader to consciously indulge in the Lyonesse legend. Arthur Norway, for instance, explained that at Land’s End ‘[t]his cliff, if there be any truth in tradition, did not always border the seashore’.⁸⁷ Likewise, the Ordnance Survey Archaeology Officer O. G. S. Crawford began his article on the Scilly Isles with the sentence: ‘Once upon a time (so tradition says) a region of extreme fertility lay between the Scilly Islands and Cornwall’.⁸⁸ Norway’s commas and Crawford’s parentheses are interruptions that serve as a knowing nod to the reader, prompting their scepticism at the same time as their imaginative faculties are being activated. Perhaps in an attempt to satisfy both the imaginative dreamers and the hard-headed sceptics, the journalist J. W. Lambert offered a choice to his readers at the edge of the land, where ‘you may if you wish marshal your visions of Lyonesse’.⁸⁹ In the same vein, Arthur Salmon mentioned that the visitor could, ‘if we choose ... dream of some old Atlantis’ when looking out across the shallow western seas.⁹⁰ The effect of all these qualifying remarks is to encourage a suspension of disbelief; a knowing indulgence in the imagination, which can share in the wonders of Lyonesse without being beguiled by them. For Saler, Landy and the scholars of re-enchantment,

this is a distinctly modern form of enchantment which ‘delights’ but does not ‘delude’.⁹¹

Indeed, some imaginative effort on the part of the traveller or reader was required for the full experience to be attained. To reject any sort of engagement with the story for want of definitive proof was to miss the enjoyment that could be found in the murky combination of Arthurian tradition, the Cornish landscape, and the distant past. Cornwall and its legends did not shine brightly but instead, as F. A. Ginever put it in the *Cornishman*, they ‘shimmer with romance’ in a region where ‘one walks on enchanted ground’.⁹² Arthur Norway emphasised the power of vagueness by asking his readers directly: ‘Is there any truth in this old story? Was there ever such a land stretching westwards from these cliffs?’⁹³ The clarity-seeking visitor was a figure of ridicule in *Black’s Guide to Cornwall* (1919), which poked fun at an ‘American fellow-tourist’ at the Tintagel ruins who was disappointed not to see the Round Table itself, and the guidebook teased that they were ‘even half expecting the Holy Grail to be on view’. When it came to Arthurian romance, to demand clarity was to misunderstand that ‘fragments and traces’ and ‘[p]uzzling hints’ held the key to enchantment, and when it came to the legend of Lyonesse, the guidebook concluded: ‘Let us, by all means, give ourselves up to such poetic dreams as have grown to haunt the Cornish headland’.⁹⁴

Travel writers also reported their encounters with local people, who served the dual purpose of either intensifying or mischievously undermining the legend of Lyonesse. After raising several questions with the reader, Arthur Norway turned his attention to ‘those who haunt the cliffside cottages’, among whom:

many a burly giant will drop his voice to an awed whisper as he tells you how he has seen towers and houses far down in the depths of the transparent water, and long oarweed waving round the steeples which once summoned the folk of some wide parish to prayer.⁹⁵

In this passage, Norway implied that the traveller and perhaps even the reader could indulge in the ‘rich Keltic fancy’ of the local people, whose thoughts, he suggested, ‘run quickly into the land of pure imagination’.⁹⁶ In contrast, when C. Lewis Hind met with two coastguards while tramping around Cape Cornwall he was initially met with scepticism when he suggested that between them and the Scilly Isles – ‘fairy isles floating in a fairy sea’ – lay the lost land of Lyonesse:

The coastguards were dubious. ‘There’s deep sea there,’ said the bearded one, ‘though the Seven Stones between here and Scilly be land sure enough’.

After Hind persisted by explaining in more detail the supposed location of the drowned land, one of the coastguards admitted: ‘A chap told me that when the sea is quiet you can hear church bells ringing down below. I dunno’.⁹⁷ Later in the narrative, at Perranuthnoe near St Michael’s Mount, Hind tried his luck with his driver, to whom he mentioned the tradition that they were near the spot where an ancestor of the Trevelyan family survived the inundation on his horse:

The driver of the dogcart had not heard of the miracle of Perran Uthnoe. No Cornishman that I ever met was familiar with one of the legends; it is the guide-books that perpetuate them. ‘They wouldn’t know what you mean by Perran Uthnoe about here,’ he said smiling. ‘We call it Perran’.⁹⁸

For many travellers, then, the principal method of approaching the Lyonesse story was in a playful and knowing manner. Travellers frequently displayed a willingness to indulge in the story, to be entertained by it, and to give themselves up to ‘poetic dreams’ or even find enjoyment in encounters with local people who undermined them. However, there was also a strand of interest that treated the legend with the same type of geological curiosity as Hy Brasil and Cante’r Gwaelod. Submerged forests in Mount’s Bay and submarine stone structures in the Scilly Isles brought geology, archaeology and tradition together in lively discussions about the truth behind the Lyonesse legend, in which the traveller might hear echoes of a historical inundation of the land.

Many of these discussions centred on the submerged forest in Mount’s Bay, which had provoked interest at least as early as 1757, when the Cornish naturalist William Borlase encountered roots, trunks and branches of oak, willow and hazel up to ‘300 yards below the full-sea-mark’, where they lay below ‘at least 12 feet of water’ at high tide.⁹⁹ In *Submerged Forests* (1913), the geologist Clement Reid summarised the state of contemporary knowledge when he explained that in Cornwall ‘old land-surfaces can be found far below the sea-level’, and he drew attention to Mount’s Bay, where the submerged traces of stumps and roots suggested that the notion that St Michael’s Mount was once surrounded by a wood ‘is probably quite accurate’.¹⁰⁰ Reid suggested that the change in sea level amounted to ‘80 feet, or perhaps rather more’, and, based on the known rate of ongoing encroachment, he estimated that ‘the sea cannot have reached the Mount till long after the Roman period’.¹⁰¹ In the book’s conclusion, Reid wondered whether stories of deluge had their origin in the inundations evidenced by the geological record. Rather than pursuing the matter further, Reid merely acknowledged that the submergence of land probably began around 3000 BC. This was not a period of ‘great geological antiquity’, but a time when ‘geology, archaeology, and history meet and overlap’.¹⁰²

If Reid was unwilling to pursue the matter, travel writers certainly were, and many of their accounts drew on the antiquarian, chemist and photographer Robert Hunt, who wrote about Mount's Bay in *Popular Romances of the West of England* (1865). In his chapter on 'Romances of Lost Cities', Hunt aimed to 'show that those dim traditions point to some buried truth'.¹⁰³ One of these traditions was preserved in the name of an anchoring place on the western side of Mount's Bay called Gwavas Lake. 'It is not a little curious that any part of the ocean should be called a lake', wrote Hunt, and according to tradition the lake was overwhelmed along with churches, houses and people during the 'great flood' that separated the Scilly Isles from England. Furthermore, evidence in support of this tradition could be seen on 'a fine summer day, when the tide is low and the waters clear', in the form of a submerged forest.¹⁰⁴ In a footnote Hunt recalled, as a schoolboy, setting out past the large tree trunks cast upon the shoreline and walking far out into the bay after a 'violent equinoctial gale' where there were 'scores of trees embedded in the sands'.¹⁰⁵ This evocative memory made an impression on C. Lewis Hind, who quoted a sizeable chunk of Hunt's text when, as he looked down on Mount's Bay, his thoughts turned to the 'primeval forest' and 'the tempest and flood that overwhelmed Lyonesse'.¹⁰⁶ Charles G. Harper also quoted Hunt's childhood memory, before confirming that 'I, too, have found, cast upon the shore, traces of this submarine forest'.¹⁰⁷

Geological research had established the idea that, as an article in the *Cornishman* put it in 1896, 'a great part of the British Isles had sunk below the sea, and risen again, time after time'.¹⁰⁸ In other words, 'this Kingdom was and is, physically speaking, in a fluid state'.¹⁰⁹ In this way, geology carved out new space for the imagination when it came to stories of sunken lands. In a lecture on the 'History of Devonshire scenery' in 1901, the principal of the Royal Albert Memorial College, Arthur W. Clayden, took this to the extreme when he declared that the 'fabled land of Lyonesse there can be no doubt was once a reality',¹¹⁰ and Thomas Cornish had made a similarly bold claim when he told the Penzance Natural History and Antiquarian Society that 'science would, before long, establish the fact that the Land's End and the Scilly Islands were at one time united' and that Lyonesse 'is a reality'.¹¹¹

Most travel writers did not stretch the imagination so far, and instead remained enchanted within firm limitations, sticking to what might be deduced from the physical evidence of the submerged forest in Mount's Bay. Arthur Salmon claimed that tales such as Lyonesse were generally 'inaccurate in detail' but were 'rarely baseless', and the 'fact that the shallow seas extend far westward cannot be ignored'. When it came to

Lyonesse, wrote Salmon, ‘we are not dealing with absurdities’, and this was ‘an alluring vision on which we can linger without the sense of being actually unhistoric’.¹¹² This was typical of the way travel writers tempered their imaginations. In Sidney Heath’s words, the denudation was ‘of course within the bounds of geological possibility’, and ‘there is probably a certain rough truth in the old legends’.¹¹³ For Arthur Norway the alluring and enchanting element of the legend was ‘a kernel of truth’ that, however ‘twisted or concealed by careless repetition’, could not be ignored.¹¹⁴

At the other side of the submerged realm, the Scilly Isles were equally compelling to naturalists and geologists. After some initial observations in the eighteenth-century publications of Robert Heath (1750) and William Borlase (1753, 1756), a more systematic treatment of the islands’ geology emerged in Henry De la Beche’s *Report on the Geology of Cornwall, Devon and West Somerset* (1839) and Joseph Carne’s ‘On the Geology of the Islands of Scilly’ (1850).¹¹⁵ By the early twentieth century, it had long been understood that a submerged inland valley existed between the islands of Samson, Tresco and Bryher, which, as George Barrow explained in *Geology of the Isles of Scilly* (1906), was formed through a combination of denudation and subsidence.¹¹⁶ As in Cornwall, geological knowledge of subsidence prompted discussions of the Lyonesse legend, but inspiration travelled in the other direction, too. For instance, in an article published in 1912, Samuel Hazzledine Warren presented evidence of a Mesolithic and Neolithic land off the Essex coast and proposed that it should be named the ‘Lyonesse Surface’.¹¹⁷

The interplay between research and tradition continued in the interwar period. In a journey that paralleled William Ashton’s visit to Sarn Badrig in Cardigan Bay, in 1927 the aforementioned O. G. S. Crawford published an account of travelling to the Scilly Isles in the first issue of *Antiquity*.¹¹⁸ Crawford’s article, ‘Lyonesse’, is heterogenous and entertaining. As a field archaeologist writing a journal article, he duly set out to collect and assess ‘evidence, both archaeological and historical’, and situated his observations in relation to previous research by Borlase, Barrow and Reid. Yet, as quoted above, the paper began with the traditional fairy tale opening ‘Once upon a time’ followed by a summary of the Lyonesse legend. In the manner of a travel writer, Crawford asked whether the story had ‘any real basis in fact, or is it merely an invention of the “dreamy Celt”?’¹¹⁹

To answer this question, Crawford set out on a ‘submarine walk’ across the sandflats between Samson, Tresco and Bryher, taking advantage of the lowest spring tides in March 1926. Accompanied by his photographer, Alexander Gibson, Crawford wished to photograph and examine at close quarters a long straight line of stones he had seen from the high ground

on Samson. As they walked out over the sands, it became clear that ‘the line of stones was undoubtedly the remains of a wall of human construction’:

It was one of those thrilling moments which occasionally occur in the life of an archaeologist. Here before us was tangible proof that the land had sunk since prehistoric times; for no one makes walls like this below high water mark.¹²⁰

Gibson’s wide-angle photograph illustrates the straight trajectory of the ‘boulder-hedge’ across the tidal wetland from a distance, and this is accompanied by a detailed image of the stones with Crawford in the background, surveying the scene in contemplation. Gibson’s photographs also draw comparison with contemporary field walls on St Mary’s, which ‘are made in exactly the same way’.¹²¹ Crawford’s role as a pioneer in non-military aerial photography is indicated by his article’s use of aerial photographs of the flats, taken by the coastal reconnaissance unit No. 480 Flight based in RAF Calshot.¹²² These observations led Crawford to the belief that the ‘whole archipelago’ was at one time ‘one or more large islands’, and the contemporary sandflat was once a fertile level plain with deep soil and ‘sheltered on all sides by higher ground’. This is where the ‘prehistoric builders of the submerged walls’ grazed their flocks and herds until the inland plain was submerged by the sea.¹²³ Crawford suggested that, if Lyonesse were associated with the Scilly Isles rather than with the region between them and Land’s End, then there were ‘good reasons for believing that the substance of the legend is true’.¹²⁴

Crawford’s flair for storytelling recurs at several points in the article, including his brief description of getting caught at the turn of the tide while walking between Samson and Tresco. Furthermore, alongside geology, Crawford was equally interested in folkloric explanations of how the boulder-hedges came about, and he retold stories of giants taken from Hunt’s *Popular Romances* and drew on the work of the folklorist Charlotte Sophia Burne when making a comparison with tales that surround submerged structures in Shropshire.¹²⁵ Bringing his wide-ranging interests together, Crawford concluded that the fishermen who told tales of a sunken land were correct, although this process was gradual rather than cataclysmic. Combining enchantment with laconic humour in his closing line, Crawford remarked that the legend of Lyonesse ‘undoubtedly contains a vestige of antiquity’ but, given the ‘infinite slowness’ of the inundation, Trevelyan ‘hasted in vain’.¹²⁶

There was a wide range of responses to the Lyonesse legend. Some writers preferred to reject it outright whereas others looked for corroborating

facts in medieval texts and in the archaeological and geological record. The Great Western Railway marketed the legend as an attraction for tourist consumption, and their playful engagement with the story set the tone for many travel writers. There remained, however, an irresistible ambiguity surrounding the origin of the tale that, as Jessie Mothersole put it, ‘sober, unromantic people spend their efforts and waste their breath in trying to disprove’.¹²⁷ Catherine A. Dawson Scott called in vain for a wealthy philanthropist to dredge the seabed between Land’s End and the Scilly Isles to ‘settle the vexed question for good and all!’¹²⁸ But the question could not be settled, and beneath the tale of Arthur’s last battle and Merlin’s magic the existence of some underlying truth was widely accepted. An article in the *Globe* in 1906 described this as a ‘qualified acceptance of tradition’ that was aided by science. Those who ‘mock at the tale of Lost Lyonesse’, the article went on, request ‘dates of this and that’ or ‘documents in support’, but these were the ‘subterfuges of the sceptic’ and the work of ‘mental miscreants’ who lacked ‘reverence for the ancestral ages’.¹²⁹ It was also a futile endeavour because Lyonesse exercised a power over the imagination that was enhanced by ambiguity, which in turn opened a space in which scepticism, rationalisation and imagination existed together in frustrating, tantalising and enchanting combination.

Conclusion

Mythical islands and sunken lands remain alluring today. At the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale, called ‘The Laboratory of the Future’, the Irish Pavilion presented ‘In Search of Hy Brasil’. The exhibition was based on fieldwork undertaken on Ireland’s remote islands, showcasing local materials and raising awareness of sustainable living by promoting renewable energy, ethical food production and biodiversity.¹³⁰ Sunken lands periodically crop up in news stories when new evidence comes to light, such as the spectacular skull and antlers discovered at Borth in 2016 which, initially believed to be between 4,000 and 6,000 years old, are now known to have belonged to a deer that lived and died in the Bronze Age, between 1200 and 1000 BC.¹³¹ Moreover, as concerns about rising sea levels and climate change mount, the last decade or so has seen a series of major research projects in the sciences, demonstrating that the subject continues to grasp the academic imagination. Between 2009 and 2013, *The Lyonesse Project* carried out research into the coastal and marine environment of the Scilly Isles, concluding that a rapid submergence did indeed take place around

7000 BC, and the large area of saltmarsh between the islands would have been used for grazing animals before it eroded around the seventh century.¹³² Two years later another project, *Europe's Lost Frontiers*, began mapping landscapes that were submerged at the end of the last ice age, focusing mainly on Doggerland, but also on areas such as Cardigan Bay.¹³³ From 2023, the *Portalis Project* has undertaken drilled core sampling, excavation and laboratory analysis to examine coastal communities in eastern Ireland and western Wales, exploring historical connections going back 10,000 years, and the pilot project revealed evidence of Mesolithic communities abandoning submerged terrain and settling on higher ground.¹³⁴

In an article called 'Semantics of the Sea', geo-archaeologists Erin Kavanagh and Martin Bates attempt to bring together 'flood-related folk tales' and geological evidence, and, in their research on the post-glacial coastal evolution of Cardigan Bay the physical geographer Simon Haslett and the historical linguist David Willis found parallels between geological and bathymetric evidence, tales of sunken lands, and historical sources such as the Gough Map.¹³⁵ The attempt to bring together geology, history and folklore remains appealing but, as Kavanagh and Bates admitted, the precise relationship between these 'disparate' bodies of evidence remains 'opaque'.¹³⁶ The two chapters in this section have shown how we might understand the significance of this relationship, at least in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the authority of geological and archaeological research provided a key ingredient in the new fascination with imaginative stories of elusive islands and sunken lands. This fascination was sustained by the power of ambiguity and doubt, and it took a variety of forms, from 'double consciousness' and playful indulgence to sincere and affecting encounters with the Atlantic edge. It also influenced the way people expressed their alarm at the precarity of coastal habitation and lack of control over ongoing erosion and rising sea levels, which reminds us that the sea was not solely associated with imperial expansion and the lyrics of 'Rule, Britannia'. As one commentator put it in 1904, evidence of coastal erosion and tales such as *Lyonesse* and *Cantre'r Gwaelod* made it clear that 'the sea that has made can also mar. The useful servant may become a tyrannical master'.¹³⁷ More broadly, the cultural developments explored in these two chapters were driven by the expansion of infrastructure, a mass print industry, and by self-consciously sceptical readings of the stories, which, in the end, could not be dismissed as pure fantasy. If these are some of the hallmarks of British and Irish modernity, then western landscapes, seascapes, elusive islands, and sunken lands were especially potent places of modern enchantment.

Notes

1. K. E. Kavanagh and M. R. Bates, 'Semantics of the Sea: Stories and Science along the Celtic Seaboard', *Internet Archaeology* vol. 53 (2019), accessed 1 February 2025, <https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.53.8>; see W. B. Dawkins, *Cave Hunting: Researches on the Evidence of Caves Respecting the Early Inhabitants of Europe* (London, 1874); C. Reid, *Submerged Forests* (Cambridge, 1913); J. G. D. Clark, *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe* (New York, 1970 [1936]).
2. An exception is the reference to the North Sea as 'a wide and level country' in H. G. Wells, 'A Story of the Stone Age' (1897), published in H. G. Wells, *Tales of Space and Time* (London, 1900), 61–163, at 61.
3. W. Pooley, 'Doubt and the Dislocation of Magic: France, 1790–1940', *Past and Present* 261, no. 1 (2024), 133–67, quotations at 135, 138, 164.
4. Pooley, 'Doubt and the Dislocation of Magic', 142.
5. 'Flood Legends', in *Celtic Culture*, vol. 2, ed. J. Koch (Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), 754–5.
6. 'Flood Legends', 754–5; R. Bromwich, 'Cantre'r Gwaelod and Kêr-Is', in *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe*, ed. C. Fox and B. Dickins (Cambridge, 1950), 215–41, at 221–2; 'Cantre'r Gwaelod, Cantref-y-Gwaelod', in *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, ed. J. MacKillop (Oxford, 2004).
7. 'Flood Legends', 754–5; Bromwich, 'Cantre'r Gwaelod and Kêr-Is', 229–31.
8. Common spelling variations include the City of Ys or Is (English), Ville d'Ys (French), Ker Is and Kêr Iz (Breton).
9. 'Cantre'r Gwaelod, Cantref-y-Gwaelod', in *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. The two identities of Seithenyn seem to merge in some accounts. For Seithenyn as the 'Drunkard, Son of the King of South Wales', see J. C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales* (Aberystwyth, 1911), 321.
10. Pritchard's poem, and the wider movement of popularising legends attached to Welsh landscapes (and seascapes), is discussed in Morgan, 'From Death to a View', 86.
11. 'The Bells of Aberdovey', *The Cardiff Times*, 25 July 1908, 10.
12. John Rhys commented on the different versions of the tale in 'Chwedloniaeth Gymraeg', *Y Traethodydd* 35, no. 4 (1880), 476–84, specifically at 479–81.
13. Quotation from *North Wales (Southern)* (1912), 100–101; *Blue Guides: Wales* (1922), 140. This version of the story was also summarised in 'Cardiganshire', in Chrisholm Hugh ed., *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn (Cambridge, 1911), vol. 5, 320.
14. S. Baring-Gould, *A Book of North Wales* (London, 1903), 239–40.
15. 'Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society', *Cambrian News*, 20 September 1912, 6; 'The London Welsh Choir and the Merthyr Eisteddfod', *South Wales Daily News*, 7 January 1881, 4; 'Second Day's Awards', *Western Mail*, 8 August 1928, 10.
16. 'Denbigh', *North Wales Times*, 19 December 1908, 4; 'National Eisteddfod Crown', *Western Mail*, 7 August 1925, 9.
17. 'Pageantry at Harlech', *Western Mail*, 24 August 1920, 8; A. Bartie, L. Fleming, M. Freeman, T. Hulme, A. Hutton and P. Readman, 'The Pageant of Harlech Castle', *The Redress of the Past*, accessed 1 February 2025, <http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1287/>.
18. 'Harlech Castle Pomp', *Western Mail*, 22 August 1922, 4.
19. A. P. Gomer to the editor, 'The Preservation of the Welsh Language. To the Editor', *South Wales Daily News*, 31 May 1902, 3.

20. Bromwich, 'Cantre'r Gwaelod and Kêr-Is', 225–7; W. Ashton, *The Evolution of a Coast-Line* (London, 1920), 268, 270. Sarn Dewi and Sarn Cadwgan are similar formations, though less commented upon in the source material.
21. 'Whitsun and Early Holidays', *Sheffield Independent*, 5 June 1935, 3.
22. Bradley, *Highways and Byways in North Wales* (1898), 388–9.
23. Mrs R. Stawell, *Motor Tours in Wales and the Border Counties* (Boston, MA, 1909), 123–4.
24. A. C. Ramsay, *The Geology of North Wales, Memoirs of the Geological Survey of Great Britain and of the Museum of Practical Geology*, vol. 3 (London, 1866), 26; Ramsay's phrase 'sunken reef' is repeated in 'Our Reviewer's Table', *Barmouth and County Advertiser*, 5 March 1903, 7.
25. *Black's Guide to North Wales*, 21st edn (London, 1897), 188–9; Askew Roberts and Edward Woodall, *Gossiping Guide to Wales (North Wales and Aberystwyth)* (London, 1902), 93. *Black's North Wales* (1897) was similarly sceptical of those who 'still fancy they can trace the ruins of Helig's pride' along the northern coastline between Llandudno and Penmaenmawr – see 38–9.
26. B. Willson, *Lost England: The Story of Our Submerged Coasts* (London, 1902), p. 36.
27. Muirhead, *Blue Guides: Wales* (1922), xix.
28. Lewis and Lewis, *Land of Wales* (1937), 1–2.
29. L. Agassiz, 'On Glaciers, and the Evidence of Their Having Once Existed in Scotland, Ireland, and England', *Proceedings of the Geological Society of London* 3, pt. 2, no. 72 (1840), 327–32; Agassiz had previously introduced his glacial theory in *Études sur les Glaciers* (Neuchâtel, 1840).
30. Clark, *Mesolithic Settlement* (1970 [1936]), 7–8. In Scotland, the rebound outpaced the rise in sea level.
31. W. Keeping, 'Geology of Aberystwyth', *Geological Magazine*, 5 (1878), 532–47, at 542–3.
32. 'Buried Welsh Cities. Cardigan Bay Once a Fertile Plain', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 November 1932, 4.
33. T. A. Glenn, 'Distribution of the Graig Lwyd Axe and Its Associated Cultures', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 90 (1935), 189–218 at 206–7. Quotation at 206 n5.
34. W. B. Dawkins, *Early Man in Britain* (London, 1880), 253. Dawkins made a similar comment in his 'Address on the Place of a University in the History of Wales' (Bangor, 1900), quoted in John Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore* (London, 1909), 388–9.
35. O. T. Jones, 'The Origin of Welsh Legends', *The Welsh Outlook* 8 (1921), 309–12, at 309.
36. Jones, 'Origin of Welsh Legends', 310–11.
37. Jones, 'Origin of Welsh Legends', 312.
38. D. J. Davies, 'Cantref y Gwaelod', *Transactions and Archaeological Record, Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society* 5 (1927), 21–33, at 26, 29.
39. H. Godwin, 'Coastal Peat Beds of the British Isles and North Sea: Presidential Address to the British Ecological Society 1943', *Journal of Ecology* 31, no. 2 (1943), 199–247, at 225.
40. 'Notes and Queries', *Manchester Times*, 15 September 1893, 5; 'Answers and Comments', *Manchester Times*, 22 September 1893, 5.
41. Fleure, 'Land of Wales' (1922), xviii. Also see H. J. Fleure, *Some Aspects of British Civilisation* (Oxford, 1948).
42. 'Places Worth Visiting. Aberystwyth', *Aberystwyth Observer*, 10 November 1888, 8.

43. J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales: From Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, vol. 1 (London, 1911), 5.
44. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1911) vol. 5, 320.
45. Ashton, *Evolution of a Coast-Line* (1920), 265.
46. Ashton, *The Evolution of a Coast-Line* (1920), 272. Ashton's claim that subsidence was ongoing was disputed by other geologists, who generally insisted that it took place in the Neolithic period. O. T. Jones disagreed with Ashton's theory explicitly in 'Origin of Welsh Legends' (1921), 311.
47. Ashton, *Evolution of a Coast-Line* (1920), 271.
48. Ashton, *The Evolution of a Coast-Line* (1920), 273–4.
49. Ashton, *The Evolution of a Coast-Line* (1920), 274–5.
50. Ashton, *The Evolution of a Coast-Line* (1920), 265–75.
51. 'The Storm and High Tides', *The Morning Post*, 20 October 1883, 5; R. Duck, *On the Edge: Coastlines of Britain* (Edinburgh, 2015), 69.
52. Duck, *On the Edge*, 57–8, 70. Despite being re-laid further inland, the Pwllheli tramline was destroyed again in 1927.
53. Duck, *On the Edge*, 70–71.
54. 'Havoc on the West Coast', *Western Chronicle*, 1 December 1905, 7; 'Gale and Flood', *The Times*, 24 November 1938, 14.
55. Duck, *On the Edge*, 200–201.
56. 'Welsh Gossip', *South Wales Daily News*, 6 February 1896, 4.
57. 'Our Wasting Shores', *Dover Express*, 15 May 1896, 3.
58. 'Greedy Neptune', *North Wales Weekly News*, 14 September 1906, 7.
59. J. S. Owens, 'Royal Commission on Coast Erosion', *The Geographical Journal* 38, no. 6 (December 1911), 598–601.
60. Quoted in Owens, 'Royal Commission on Coast Erosion' (1911), 600.
61. 'Coast Erosion', *Western Mail*, 22 March 1929, 6.
62. G. B. Barham, *Legend Land: Being a Collection of Some of the Old Tales in those Western Parts of Britain Served by the Great Western Railway, Now Retold by Lyonesse*, vol. 2 (London, 1922), 29.
63. A. D. H. Bivar, 'Lyonesse: The Evolution of a Fable', *Modern Philology* 50, no. 5 (1953), 162–70, at 162–4, 167–9.
64. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. E. E. C. Gomme (London, 1909), 215.
65. *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, ed. and trans. T. Forester (London, 1854), 206. This chronicle is now attributed to another monk, John of Worcester.
66. Bivar, 'Lyonesse', 165–6. Worcester's itinerary bears the influence of the twelfth-century French source *Roman de Mont Saint-Michel*, which in turn drew on the earlier, twelfth-century *Roman d'Aquin*. See Bivar, 'Lyonesse'.
67. R. Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall. Written by Richard Carew of Antonie, Esquire* (London, 1602), 3. EEBO, accessed 1 February 2025, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/A17958.0001.001>.
68. For an English translation of Camden's comments, see W. Camden, *Camden's Britannia Newly Translated into English, With Large Additions and Improvements*, trans. E. Gibson (London, 1695 [1586]), see the section on 'Cornwall'.
69. Bivar, 'Lyonesse', 170.

70. A., Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (London, 1904), 402. The quotation is from 'The Passing of Arthur', first published in 1869.
71. Examples include A. C. Swinburne, 'Tristram of Lyonesse' (1882); W. Besant, *Armored of Lyonesse* (London, 1890); T. Hardy, 'When I Set Out for Lyonesse' (1870), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), 'A Mere Interlude' (1885), and *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall in Tintagel* (1923); W. de la Mare, 'Sunk Lyonesse' (1921); M. E. Chase, *Dawn in Lyonesse* (1938).
72. "'The Famous Tragedy". Dorset Players Perform in London', *Western Morning News*, 22 February 1924, 4.
73. H. Jenner, 'Lost Lyonesse', *Western Morning News*, 21 February 1921, 4.
74. Heath, *Cornish Riviera* (1911), 38. For other examples of travel writers turning their thoughts to Lyonesse at Land's End, see A. H. Norway, *Highways and Byways in Devon and Cornwall* (London, 1897), 302–3; Bates, *Gretna Green to Land's End* (1908), 377–8; and Hind, *Days in Cornwall* (1907), 350.
75. W. F. Clark, 'The Guarded Mount. A Cornish Beauty Spot', *The Scotsman*, 12 September 1927, 8.
76. G. E. Mitton, *Cornwall*, painted by G. F. Nicholls (London, 1915), 55–6. For other examples of Tennyson's lines quoted in guidebooks and travelogues, see A. R. H. Moncrieff, ed., *Black's Guide to Cornwall*, 22nd edn (London, 1919), 175; J. Mothersole, *The Isles of Scilly. Their Story, Their Folk and Their Flowers*, 3rd edn (London, 1919 [1910]), 62–3.
77. 'The Lyonesse at Scilly', *Cornishman*, 25 April 1889, 7; 'About the Islands of Scilly', *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 6 June 1890, 5; 'Penzance', *Cornishman*, 18 August 1898, 4.
78. S. Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000), 201–2.
79. J. P. Sayer, 'Cornwall, Land of Legend, History and Romance', c.1934 [Great Western Railway poster].
80. Barham, *Legend Land*, vol. 2 (1922), 28–31.
81. For a review of the leaflet series, see 'Lure of Legend Land. More Great Western Travel Pamphlets', *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 9 February 1924, 25.
82. J. C. Tonkin and P. Row, *Lyonesse: A Handbook for the Isles of Scilly*, 2nd edn (St Mary's, 1900 [1898]), 32.
83. J. H. Harris, *Cornish Saints and Sinners* (London, 1906), 30.
84. GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 69.
85. W. H. Tregellas, *Tourist's Guide to Cornwall and the Scilly Isles* (London, 1878), 2.
86. 'Lundy Island', *Exeter Flying Post*, 11 April 1883, 6.
87. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 303.
88. O. G. S. Crawford, 'Lyonesse', *Antiquity* 1, no. 1 (1927), 5–14, at 5.
89. J. W. Lambert, *The Penguin Guides: Cornwall* (London, 1939), 96.
90. A. L. Salmon, *The Cornwall Coast* (London, 1910), 15.
91. Landy and Saler, 'Varieties of Modern Enchantment', 2.
92. F. A. Ginever, "'One and All" Notes', *Cornishman*, 17 August 1905, 4.
93. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 303.
94. *Black's Cornwall* (1919), 27–8.
95. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 303–5.

96. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 303–5.
97. Hind, *Days in Cornwall* (1907), 163–4.
98. Hind, *Days in Cornwall* (1907), 198.
99. W. Borlase, 'An Account of Some Trees Discovered Under-ground on the Shore at Mount's-Bay in Cornwall', *Philosophical Transactions* (1683–1775), vol. 50 (1757–8), 51–3.
100. Reid, *Submerged Forests* (1913), 100–101.
101. Reid, *Submerged Forests* (1913), 100–101.
102. Reid, *Submerged Forests* (1913), 120.
103. R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (London, 1865), 207–8.
104. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (1865), 219.
105. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England* (1865), 219–20n.
106. Hind, *Days in Cornwall* (1907), 191–2.
107. C. G. Harper, *The Cornish Coast (South) and the Isles of Scilly* (London, 1910), 206.
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109. 'How England Grows by Winning Land from the Sea', *Falkirk Herald*, 30 July 1902, 8.
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112. Salmon, *Cornwall Coast* (1910), 14–15.
113. Heath, *Cornish Riviera* (1911), 38–40.
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116. G. Barrow, *Geology of the Isles of Scilly* (London, 1906), 1–3.
117. S. H. Warren, 'The Classification of the Prehistoric Remains of Eastern Essex', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 42 (1912), 91–127, at 104. This is mentioned in Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), 10.
118. Crawford founded the journal and was its editor until he died in 1957.
119. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), 5.
120. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), 5.
121. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), plate I facing, page 5; plate II, facing page 6; quotation at 7.
122. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), facing 14.
123. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), 9.
124. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), 5.
125. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), 8, 13.

126. Crawford, 'Lyonesse' (1927), 14.
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128. C. A. D. Scott, *Nooks and Corners of Cornwall* (London, 1911), 101.
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130. 'Hy-Brasil – Ireland's representation at the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale', Irish Government, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, 4 May 2023, accessed 1 February 2025, <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/o4a32-hy-brasil-irelands-representation-at-the-2023-venice-architecture-biennale/>.
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133. V. Gaffney and S. Fitch, eds, *Europe's Lost Frontiers*, vol. 1, *Context and Methodology* (Oxford, 2022).
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135. Kavanagh and Bates, 'Semantics of the Sea'; S. K. Haslett and D. Willis, 'The "Lost" Islands of Cardigan Bay, Wales, UK: Insights into the Post-glacial Evolution of Some Celtic Coasts of Northwest Europe', *Atlantic Geoscience* 58 (2022), 131–46.
136. Kavanagh and Bates, 'Semantics of the Sea', see 'Conclusion'.
137. 'Diminishing England', *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 20 May 1904, 6.

Part III

PERFORMANCE

Chapter 4

Performing travel

This chapter examines the array of performances and ‘colourful cast of characters’ that shaped the experiences of travellers in the west.¹ Drawing on the work of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu, in recent years historians and cultural geographers have understood travel in terms of ‘enaction’ as well as ‘narration’, drawing attention to the practices, embodied gestures and ‘stylised repetition of acts’ that constitute a sense of self, and through which identities are inscribed in space.² Thinking about travel as ‘performed art’, as Judith Adler has done, accentuates how travel, though it may take place infrequently, involves ‘dramatic play with the boundaries of selfhood’ in a way that constructs durable identities.³

As they moved through the west, travellers encountered landscapes that, as stages for performance, carried a set of expectations raised by guidebooks and travel literature. In this sense, travel books led travellers and readers along a beaten track and therefore offered the opportunity to conform or transgress – to stay on the beaten track, or step away from it.⁴ To spend time travelling for leisure was to move through a space where everyday ‘systems of authority’ could be questioned, and where ‘alternative identities and practices’ were produced. Travellers had the space to play at different roles and identities, away from their everyday routine.⁵

Several prominent themes emerge from this reading of travel as performance in the west. The first is the familiar desire to escape the ‘beaten track’, avoid tourist crowds, and experience authenticity.⁶ Second, self-conscious discussions about moving through the landscape, from the virtues of walking to the dangers of motoring, reveal the ambiguity with

which travellers employed the rhetoric of the modern, as they appropriated particular icons of modernity while rejecting others.⁷ These themes, though they are not unique to the west, help to situate westward travellers in a broader context of travel and tourism. The second half of this chapter, however, considers significant performances in the traveller's repertoire that establish the west as a series of landscapes that offered intensified versions of experiences that were available elsewhere in Britain and Ireland. The historical imagination was directed by the understanding that journeying westwards was a particularly affecting voyage in time as well as in space, and dramatic accounts of misadventure in the mountainous uplands or at precipitous cliff-edges were saturated in the language of Edmund Burke and Romantic literature. Finally, entertaining descriptions of interactions between hosts and guests relied on stock characters such as quick-witted yet error-prone and uneducated Irish hosts, romanticised old men who imparted wisdom and knowledge and voiceless young women who were gazed upon and described as embodiments of archetypal beauty.

Escaping the beaten track

The beaten track, explains James Buzard, refers to spaces of tourism where 'all experience is predictable and repetitive', and all cultures and objects are inauthentic 'self-parodies'.⁸ The popularisation of tourism led to the development of strategies to distinguish 'true travellers from mere tourists', and the ability to recognise and leave the beaten track became the hallmark of the traveller's 'superior emotional-aesthetic sensitivity', which was set against 'always assumed tourist vulgarity, repetition, and ignorance'.⁹ Visiting the places listed in guidebooks, which included information on 'what nine tourists out of ten wish to see', was therefore looked down upon by the traveller keen to establish their credentials as one who left the beaten track.¹⁰ Morton, for instance, 'pitied those comfortable tourists who believe that Braemar and Ballater are the Scottish Highlands', and Malcolm Ferguson recommended Skye's 'less known' Vaternish peninsula – not mentioned in the guidebooks – to those wishing to avoid the crowded summer steamers and Lochs Scavaig and Coruisk dotted with yachts.¹¹ There was a beaten track in the far west of Ireland, too, and it took effort to access the places, as Harry Speight did, 'unknown to the majority of British tourists'.¹² These travel writers were part of the self-appointed few who, as Eleanor Foster put it in her article 'Off the Beaten Track' (1894), went beyond the 'show places' and got to know Ireland's 'heart'.¹³

References to tourists clinging to the beaten path reveal pejorative attitudes towards a so-called unthinking and uncultured urban mass. The term 'cockneyfication' suggests the spatial and social dimensions of this mentality, which drove travellers in Ireland away from 'tourist-ridden' Killarney and towards less frequented regions such as Connemara.¹⁴ Mary Donaldson could, apparently, spot a 'Cockney tourist' in Skye by their ignorance of issues such as the 'crofter question', and she went in search of 'Places of Unique Interest Out of the Beaten Track', where the crofters were so unfamiliar with tourists that they either 'retreated hastily' out of shyness or 'advanced on me threateningly'.¹⁵ At times, this language was mobilised by the self-professed 'educated world' against Americans, who were deemed by some to be 'on a par ... with the ordinary Cockney tourist, to whom nothing is sacred provided he can amuse himself by disfiguring it'.¹⁶ By the interwar period a more instructive tone emerged. As David Matless has shown, the enjoyment of rural landscapes by a growing proportion of the population resulted in the countryside becoming an important site of citizenship, which equally revealed the anti-citizenship of middle-class picnickers who left their litter before driving off in a motorcar, or working-class charabancers 'making a racket and leaving their empties'.¹⁷ Vaughan Cornish (1932) and Edward Shanks (1938) grumbled about 'town trippers' littering, damaging hedges, pulling up flowers and leaving gates open, but this was often accompanied by the desire to educate and instruct.¹⁸ As Shanks put it, the tripper's interest in the countryside was a noble thing, an 'ancient instinct' that 'sometimes takes a crude and unfortunate shape'.¹⁹ Travel and nature books could, then, help to educate the population about appropriate behaviour. This was the aim of the authoritatively titled *The Countryside and How to Enjoy It* (1948), and rambling associations, youth hostels and other groups published 'rules of conduct', while motorcar and motorcycle clubs urged their members to 'Leave no Litter'.²⁰ Writing in 1937, the environmentalist George Stapledon hoped that the development of a 'proper network' of paths, tracks, rides and hostels would help in 'humanising and de-urbanising at least the more venturesome of the urban masses', and would 'begin to make some sort of a stand against the baneful influences of mass psychology'.²¹

In more accessible regions of the west, travellers had to be more creative to leave the crowds behind. One strategy was to go beyond the reach of the railway. In north Wales, this meant venturing beyond Pwllheli and down the Llŷn Peninsula which, according to the guidebooks, was 'almost wholly unexplored' and 'entirely enchanting', having retained an air of remoteness for the traveller 'who wishes to deviate from the beaten track'.²² In Cornwall, the Great Western Railway terminus at Penzance left little

room on the mainland beyond the railway. But from Penzance the traveller could catch the steamer to the Scilly Isles where, as Jessie Mothersole wrote, 'no smoke from city, factory, or railway contaminates their pure air, or dims the brilliancy of their sunshine'. These were 'virgin-isles, still unspoiled and inviolate in this prosaic age', where 'beauty and charm are apt to flee before the path of progress'.²³ Alternatively, avoiding the summer season ensured that C. Lewis Hind was the only guest at the hotel in Tintagel, and he waited until after sunset to walk from Sennen to the Land's End 'when the last of the daily tourists has departed'.²⁴ In popular tourist regions, escaping the beaten track was not simply a matter of where one travelled, but also a matter of when, and Morton used this strategy when visiting Helston for the Furry Dance, a folk festival that marks the beginning of spring. Whereas other interwar writers warned that the event had turned into a 'spectacle' for tourists,²⁵ Morton arrived early in the morning and took part in the Servants' Dance with the locals, when 'the eyes of the world were not fixed on the dancers', so that 'for an hour or so the spirit of Merrie England lived again in Cornwall'.²⁶

The guidebook became symbolic of the beaten track and mass tourism, and dispensing with it was as important as physically moving away from the well-trodden tourist trail. Hudson explained that, though useful, when overused the guidebook 'comes between us and that rarest and most exquisite enjoyment to be experienced amidst novel scenes'. That enjoyment was found in 'the element of surprise', the 'shock of pleasure', and the 'charm of the unknown', all of which produced an intense emotional experience.²⁷ The expression of disappointment was an effective way for travel writers to signal that they were aware of the expectations raised by the guidebooks, and that they had experienced something rather different. Robert Lynd was disappointed on entering Galway when, instead of the 'historic Spanish city with streets of courtly marbles' and the 'wild, fierce, and most original town' described by Thackeray, or the 'finely formed' dark features described by Mr and Mrs Hall (1843), he saw 'houses one might see anywhere' and a 'wrinkled old woman who sits huddled in her shawl on the pavement'.²⁸ Similarly, the author and journalist J. J. Bell warned his readers that other writers, 'conjurers with words', had misled people about Loch Coruisk, where 'the soaring peaks do not actually overhang the loch', and the surrounding steeps are 'in no place impassable'.²⁹ The relationship between guidebooks, authenticity and travel writing was not straightforward, though. Experiencing disappointment might also be considered part of the travel writer's stock-in-trade, and at Tintagel, underwhelmed visitors such as Morton and Arthur Salmon were more likely replicating Tennyson's disappointment at the ruins during his visit in 1848.³⁰

Moving through the landscape

Travellers' self-conscious descriptions of moving through the landscape reveal similar strategies of portraying authenticity while directing contempt towards others. The benefits of walking, for instance, were often set against the perceived alienating consequences of modern travel. Previously associated with poverty and vagrancy, walking emerged as a middle-class pursuit in public gardens and in the countryside, where pedestrians went in search of the sublime and picturesque, antiquities and geological formations, and an escape from urban life.³¹ By the 1930s countryside walking was also a working-class leisure pursuit, and some estimates suggest there were over 500,000 regular country walkers in Britain.³² For Hudson, walking restored the intimacy with landscape lost to technological innovations such as the bicycle and motorcar, which made the traveller feel less 'native to the earth'.³³ Hudson was writing as part of a long literary tradition, built on the foundational writings of William Wordsworth, and expanded by writers such as William Hazlitt, Henry David Thoreau, Leslie Stephen, Robert Louis Stevenson, G. M. Trevelyan and Edward Thomas. For Hudson and many others, walking was a primitive and natural way of connecting with the physical world, which in turn afforded the walker heightened powers of perception and thought.³⁴

There was a spiritual dividend to be gained, too. During his 'Welsh Walk' Edmund Vale described being on foot as producing 'a sort of general feeling' and 'an atmosphere for my spirit to dwell in'.³⁵ For many walkers, its spirituality was connected to inconvenience and hardship, so that to approach Loch Coruisk by steamer was, according to MacCulloch, to miss the majesty of the landscape. Instead, he argued that the best way to experience the 'grandeur of the mountains and the loch' was to proceed from Portree by Sligachan on foot. By this method:

... every step of the way takes you into a wilder country; the savage mountains draw nearer; at last you walk under their shadow; you penetrate their depths; and for reward, after tough climbing, the strange grandeur of Coruisk breaks full upon your prepared spirit.³⁶

The gradual, grounded and wearisome effects of walking were an antidote to rushing – that great sin of the tourist who followed the crowd along the beaten track to see as much as possible in the shortest time. In the Scilly Isles and Skye, rushing was associated with day trippers from the mainland who, as J. J. Bell wrote, 'cross over to Skye' for an hour or so 'just to be able to say you have been there'.³⁷ Mothersole was incredulous when describing the itinerary of a single-day excursion of the Scillies, which arrived at St Mary's before 'rushing off to the steam-launch for Treco' to

see the gardens and Cromwell's Castle, and then returning to St Mary's 'dead-beat, just in time to go on board for the homeward journey. And they call that a day's holiday!'³⁸ One wonders what Mothersole would have said about the tours outlined in the *Michelin Guide to the British Isles* (1913) and Thomas Cook's *How to See Great Britain: Escorted Motoring Tours* (1927).³⁹ Thomas Cook's 'Tour 53' by private automobile took tourists through Llandudno, Caernarfon, Llanberis, Beddgelert, Ffestiniog, Betws-y-Coed, Llangollen and Chester – 135 miles in total. This was but one day out of fourteen in a breathless itinerary that began in London and reached Oban before returning to the point of origin.⁴⁰ This was the epitome of superficial tourism, the equivalent, for Edmund Vale, of the 'pictorial post-card'. Both, he argued, give impressions of the land that lack 'life or light or perspective or atmosphere'.⁴¹

However, properly used, the motorcar could also enhance travel, by liberating motorists from railway lines and helping them rediscover 'the open road'.⁴² As Francis A. Knight put it, the railway and coach passenger was 'not entirely his own master', and the 'old encampment, the cluster of grave-mounds, or the ancient cross' appealed 'in vain' as the traveller passed by helplessly.⁴³ Michael Floyd's 'antiquarian eye' was also aided by his motorcar, which allowed him to find 'half-forgotten antiquities' such as dolmens and standing stones, a 'broken round tower among the trees', or a 'castle ruin on the far hill' for which 'you may often search on your map or in your guidebook in vain'.⁴⁴ Far from a departure from earlier forms of travel, the motorcar was associated with a revival of the old road, which allowed Thomas D. Murphy to learn things about the country and its people 'that can hardly be attained in any other way'.⁴⁵ Writing in 1926 and looking back on the early days of motoring, A. G. Bradley wrote about roads as 'a sort of historic relic', where the 'sentiment of the old coaching period lay thick' and 'the romance of old times still lingered'.⁴⁶

In fact, motoring was like pedestrianism, in that old rough roads were preferable to the new 'polished tarred surface' because they produced a strenuous and gratifying sense of adventure.⁴⁷ Floyd explained that the 'rough lonely road' between Recess and Kylemore passed between the Maamturks and the Twelve Bens, reducing him to a 'bumpy crawl' that 'gives you the leisure to drink in the beauty of the mountains on either hand in slow draughts'. The slower pace heightened Floyd's perception of 'the real loneliness of the way' and the 'primeval simplicity of the landscape', and he thought it would be a pity if the track were 'replaced by a broad concrete affair up which you can race at fifty'.⁴⁸

There can be no simple summary of the various and contradictory opinions on motoring that appeared in travel writing. Complaints about motorists generally grew alongside motorcar ownership, though. Bradley's

time in 'quiet and serene' Llangollen was interrupted by the 'hoot of the motor', and in 1927 MacCulloch grumbled about the 'petrol-driven vehicles' that 'now rush about' in 'great numbers' on newly built roads crossing Skye.⁴⁹ S. G. Bayne, who travelled through Donegal and Connemara on a jaunting car, was nearly run off the road by a reckless motorist who 'approached us at speed', while Mais and Floyd also complained about motorbuses 'charging across the country at such breakneck speeds'.⁵⁰ At the same time, however, Floyd thought Ireland was a 'paradise' because there were 'with a few minor exceptions, no tiresome speed limits', meaning that on the road between Galway and Clifden 'the motorist may keep his foot hard on the accelerator all the time',⁵¹ and Kenneth MacRae argued, in contrast to MacCulloch, that being able to approach Loch Coruisk by motor and boat was preferable to 'the fatigue of a trudge over the moors'.⁵² To those worried about 'the raucous clamour of mechanical transport', Hugh Quigley responded by pointing out that the Scottish Highlands were 'so imposing in their magnificence' that they could 'absorb this type of activity with ease'.⁵³ The ambivalent attitudes towards motor travel are personified by H. V. Morton, who conducted his search for old villages and thatched roofs from behind the steering-wheel of his Bullnose Morris. A vehicle of liberation in the hands of the conscientious traveller, motorcars could also be agents of superficiality in the hands of tourists. Discussions about motoring are characteristic of what Rieger and Dauntton describe as 'ambiguous evaluations of the present', which allowed travellers to use the rhetoric of the modern and appropriate certain 'aspects of the age' while 'selectively rejecting others'.⁵⁴

The historical imagination

Rural landscapes were widely thought of as spaces where intimate links with the preindustrial past had been preserved. Walking through the landscape could trigger historical insight, offered opportunities to find the essence of the national spirit in the dances and songs of the folk, and aerial photography revealed residual traces of historical villages and fortifications. This was a 'recoverable past'.⁵⁵ The west offered an especially rewarding experience because it was thought that, as one went westwards, the traces of the past became older. The idea that the past has a direction is familiar to Irish speakers, who understand that *siar* means 'westwards or backwards in time and space'.⁵⁶ As noted in [Chapter 2](#), Eiluned and Peter Lewis described going 'backwards, as well as westwards' to Wales, and Alexander Smith claimed that to visit Skye 'is to turn your back on the present and walk into antiquity'. The recurrent westward orientation of the

historical imagination was often combined with descriptions of what Smith called a 'spiritual atmosphere ... a ghostly something in the air of the imagination'.⁵⁷ In such passages travel writing borrowed literary techniques more commonly associated with Gothic fiction and the Celtic Revival novel, in which ruined castles in the west were eerie settings of 'temporal distortion' that blurred the distinction between past and present, and called forth what W. F. Wakeman called 'phantoms of the past'.⁵⁸ Chapters 6 and 7 examine in more detail contemporary understandings of the historical west, where geologists found the most ancient layers of rock, ethnologists claimed to spot traces of prehistoric racial types and philologists upheld grand narratives of westward migration by investigating the historic movement and contemporary survival of Celtic languages.

The archaeological record made the prehistoric past more tangible in the west, where the megalithic culture of the Atlantic seaboard enticed historically minded travellers to see what *Murray's Cornwall* (1879) described as remnants of 'a race driven to bay at the extreme corner of their country'.⁵⁹ This was a dim and distant past that stirred T. O. Russell's historical imagination on the Aran Islands, where he was deeply affected by the 'ancient and gigantic cyclopean remains' of 'some pre-historic race'. One of the fortresses, Dún Conor, stretched 200 metres in length, with 'treble walls' up to 20 feet high and 18 feet thick.⁶⁰ Russell continued:

There is something awfully grand and grim in the aspect of these ruined fortresses. To gaze on their colossal dimensions and barbaric rudeness seems to carry us back almost to the beginning of time, when the earth was inhabited by beings unlike ourselves.⁶¹

The historical imagination also offered travel writers the opportunity to distinguish between their ability to evoke this intellectual, sensitive and exclusive cultural practice, and the deficiencies of the unthinking tourist. Wakeman made it clear that only the tourist 'of archaeological proclivities' would be able to look upon 'moss-grown and grey lichen-clad' Aughnacore Castle, in Connemara, and imagine it as 'the home of the Irish chieftain of by-gone days'.⁶² The 'urge to delineate', to use Buzard's term, was perhaps more keenly felt in north Wales and Cornwall, where stone circles, tumuli, promenades and golf courses could be found in close proximity.⁶³ Most tourists, Mais moaned, 'don't see Cornwall at all' because they 'laze in deck-chairs on the sands or promenade' at Penzance and St Ives. If they only took notice of the cairns, stone crosses and cromlechs, they might recall 'legends, superstitions and traditions', see 'Phoenician miners, weighted down with their treasure of tin', and watch 'the last desperate stand of the British' against Athelstan.⁶⁴ Similarly, at Conwy Castle, Morton pitied the visitors from Llandudno, the nearby resort town, who

‘roam vaguely on the walls, trying hard to understand Conwy’s place in history, feeling that, like all old dead things that have influenced the present, it is important but dim and elusive’. Their experience is, ultimately, a disappointing one because instead of conjuring ‘the men and women who fought and suffered, failed or succeeded within these mighty walls’, they are left looking at ‘something that might once have been a kitchen’.⁶⁵ They were well intentioned but unable to recall the past, and as unimaginative tourists their lack of historical vision served as a useful foil for Morton as an informed and perceptive traveller.

Danger and misadventure

Much like the historical imagination, northern and western regions of the British-Irish Isles were especially well suited to the traveller’s attempts to adopt the persona of the adventurer. In their descriptions of desolate mountains, precipitous cliffs and wild seascapes, travellers adopted the language and imagery of Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), and valorised discomfort, danger, accidents and narrow escapes. Travel writing was packed with anecdotes of misadventure as travellers sought to emulate what Carl Thompson describes as the ‘cultural and existential prestige upon seemingly disagreeable and undesirable travel experiences’ popularised by the likes of Hazlitt, Wordsworth, Byron, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley.⁶⁶

In particular, Burke’s passages on ‘Terror’, ‘Obscurity’, ‘Power’, ‘Magnificence’ and ‘Colour’ provided a set of descriptive terms and aesthetic principles to convey the excitement of pain, danger and horror, which caused ‘delight’ when experienced at the appropriate magnitude. The ‘terror’, ‘violence’, ‘fear’, ‘profusion’ and ‘danger’ of the sublime prioritised ‘dark’ and ‘gloomy’ phenomena such as a ‘cloudy sky’ over a blue one, and bare rugged mountains over those ‘covered with a shining green turf’.⁶⁷ Burkean language shaped travellers’ descriptions of the Cuillin mountains, those ‘gloomy glories of Skye’,⁶⁸ consisting of ‘black and frowning’, ‘rocky splintered precipices’ with ‘broken tops’, ‘serrated edges’ and crevices ‘like gashes in their sheer faces’.⁶⁹ Around each corner Quigley saw ‘another wild ridge’ with ‘threatening imminence’, and caught ‘giddy glimpses’ of high mountains.⁷⁰ At Loch Scavaig, a ‘dread place’, J. J. Bell felt an atmosphere of ‘horror’ below the mountains,⁷¹ and in the north, the precipice known as ‘the Old Man of Storr’ rose to a ‘giddy height’ among a ‘series of ghostly pinnacles, broken and weather-worn’. This was a violent scene of ‘weird desolation’, where ‘shattered rocks’ lay in the ravine below.⁷² Separated by a ‘tortured surface’,⁷³ Tryfan and Glyder Fawr formed a

'wilderness of rock' in Wales's mountainous north-west,⁷⁴ and the 'barren' and 'rugged' Maamturks of Connemara also conformed to Burkean imagery.⁷⁵

Using such dramatic language to describe British and Irish peaks required some explanation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Alps were well known, and George Mallory made widely publicised attempts to climb Mount Everest. In comparison, British and Irish mountains were, in Floyd's words, 'little more than hummocks' and 'warts'.⁷⁶ In response, travel writers shifted the criteria by which mountains were judged, moving away from measuring raw height and instead emphasising dramatic viewpoints, steep ascents 'from deep glens or marshy flats',⁷⁷ and the grouping of peaks in aesthetically pleasing proportions,⁷⁸ which showed beyond doubt that 'the true character of mountains' was to be found in the west.⁷⁹ Dramatic composition also trumped sheer height along Irish and Cornish cliffscapes. Cornwall's granite coastline was, for Arthur Norway, 'rent and shattered' into 'spires and pinnacles and minarets', and Hunt contrasted the valleys and 'almost tropical vegetation' of the south with the 'grotesque' and 'savage' northern coast.⁸⁰ At the edge of Achill Island, Croaghaun was preferred to the higher Slievemore because it formed 'a tremendous precipice' overlooking the ocean thousands of feet below,⁸¹ giving the impression that 'the rest of the mountain had been suddenly cut away'.⁸² Should further endorsement of Croaghaun be required, guidebooks noted that the explorer and imperialist Sir Harry Johnston and the Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin rated the cliffs among the most thrilling they had seen.⁸³

Vivid and violent as they were, these descriptions conveyed very real dangers. Mist disorientated hikers in the Cuillin, and in Wales it crept 'wraithlike from the corries'.⁸⁴ Mountain guides, the guidebooks warned, were essential for all but the most seasoned mountaineers.⁸⁵ Cornwall was just as dangerous, where a moonlight walk along the cliffs was made perilous by 'sinister cavities' opened by erosion, and in many places the sea made bathing and boating unsafe.⁸⁶ To drive home the point, some writers listed accidents or retold stories of recent fatalities. MacCulloch listed climbers in Skye who had slipped over precipices in 1903, 1902, and 'a third some years before'. In the case of the third climber, MacCulloch described how two days later his 'mangled body' was found at the bottom of a precipice near the peak of Sgùrr nan Gilleann.⁸⁷ The authors Edith Somerville and Martin Ross described a similar incident in Connemara:

[The hills] hid their heads and shoulders in the odious mist, leaving only their steep sides visible ... It was on one of these hills that a tourist missed his footing last year in trying to get to the bottom faster than

someone else; the heather clump broke from the edge of the ravine, and the young fellow went with it. They searched for him all the summer night, and next morning a shepherd found him, dead and mutilated, at the foot of the cliff.⁸⁸

Danger could be found in many places – Clifton Johnson was almost caught by the incoming tide while returning from the Cathedral Cliffs on Achill Island, and Alexander Corkey's aeroplane nearly crashed after gliding over Croagh Patrick – but mountains and cliffs were unparalleled as settings for entertaining tales of misadventure and for cultivating the image of the adventurer-explorer, which was not simply an exercise in masculine self-fashioning.⁸⁹ Many travellers, of course, conformed to the masculine ideal as outlined by John Ruskin, who claimed in a letter written from Chamonix in 1863 that turning back from danger made one 'weaker, more lifeless, more effeminate', whereas facing up to it produced 'a stronger and better man'.⁹⁰ In 1889, T. Pilkington White recommended the 'formidable spur' of Druim nan Ramh for 'any future Skye tourist ... ambitious to try the stoutness of his boots, the soundness of his lungs, and the toughness of his sinews',⁹¹ and Edmund Vale relished facing up to the 'snow and desolation and smoking cloud' during his Welsh walk in 1914.⁹² This was an enduring idea that coloured Morton's remark, in *The Call of England* (1928), that a man could only find out 'how much of Hamlet, how much of Quixote, how much of Robin Goodfellow is in him' when alone in the country.⁹³ As Ruskin made clear, masculinity was relational, and carried with it the implication and often the explicit assertion that dangerous landscapes were 'not suited for ladies', as Murray's *Scotland* (1883) said of Skye's mountains.⁹⁴ Similarly, at the base of the Quiraing, Watt and Carter wrote that 'timid ladies and ladies' men had better remain below and enjoy the scenery',⁹⁵ and White noted that the 'Bad Step' (a tricky section above Loch Coruisk) also bore the alternative name 'The Ladies' Step', which he considered 'a fine touch of irony'.⁹⁶

However, as Ann C. Colley demonstrated in her study of nineteenth-century mountaineering, discussions of risk and danger were more inclusive than has been previously suggested.⁹⁷ This was certainly the case in the west, where many women cultivated the persona of the adventurer-traveller and asserted their expertise as mountaineers. Madame de Bovet's ascent of Croaghau, for instance, was a strenuous climb through bog, 'up the bed of some torrent', and involved grasping onto 'clumps of heather that give way under your weight'. The reward for the ascent was a 'narrow ridge' and a wall of rock descending 2,000 feet 'sheer to the ocean' that was 'breaking madly against this mighty rock'. Here, at the edge of this 'giddy' height, de Bovet shivered as she realised 'that a single false step will

precipitate you into the abyss'.⁹⁸ Even more dramatic was Elizabeth Pennell's description of the mist that descended on her and her husband while hiking in the Quiraing. Keenly aware of the lethal danger, the pair ran downhill in a 'mad flight' that took them through bracken, over boulders, down slopes 'as steep as a house' and caused 'avalanches of stones'.⁹⁹

Others, such as Mary Donaldson, preferred to face danger matter-of-factly. Donaldson's experience of the Bad Step was 'rough', but she claimed that the guidebooks made a 'great deal of fuss' and in reality it required no great courage to overcome.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, in Harta Corrie, Donaldson slid down rocks and scrambled over loose stones without trouble, and on the way to Prince Charlie's cave she crossed 'desolate moorland' where she 'plunged indifferently into pools and across burns', 'squelched in and out of bogs', all the while the rain poured.¹⁰¹ Dinah Craik, who won praise from Geraldine Mitton for her adventurous spirit,¹⁰² walked along the cliffs to the Logan Rock in western Cornwall in spite of warnings from some fellow tourists who suggested 'You'll find it a pretty stiff climb ... ladies', and kept her head when their guide took them on an 'adventure along the line of rocks' at Land's End, 'out as far as anybody was accustomed to go' and where 'one false step' would have sent her 'to the boiling whirl of waters below'.¹⁰³ More hazardous was Craik's boat trip to the sea caves beyond Tintagel on a stormy final day in Cornwall. As they entered the dark caves, the boat was

rocking on a mass of heaving waters, shut in between two high walls, so narrow that it seemed as if every heave would dash us in pieces against them; while beyond was a dense blackness, from which one heard the beat of the everlasting waves against a sort of tunnel, a stormy sea-grave from which no one could ever hope to come out alive.¹⁰⁴

The trip was worth it, though. The caves were beautiful and the conditions were terrible, '[y]et with its terror was mingled an awful delight'.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, travellers often differentiated between character-building danger and engaging in reckless risk. Smith and Hart proudly described their 'growingly reckless short cuts from summit to summit',¹⁰⁶ and Vale defied warnings in favour of the 'nobility of independence'.¹⁰⁷ But Dinah Craik directly challenged these glorified depictions of risk, danger and masculinity. In her conversation with an 'old gentleman' in Cornwall, both expressed their disapproval of the 'foolhardy bravado' of young men, while at the same time the gentleman encouraged his own daughters to be 'active and brave' and 'run some risk' as they scrambled up the rocks of Asparagus Island in Kynance Cove.¹⁰⁸ The conversation between Craik and the old gentleman indicated a broader debate about risk that gained publicity in

the aftermath of the Matterhorn tragedy of 1865 and played out within the Alpine Club in the nineteenth century, between the technical approach of so-called 'gymnasts' such as Herbert Wicks and the 'more aesthetic and reflective approach' of Martin Conway.¹⁰⁹ It was in this context that A. P. Abraham described his *Rock Climbing in Skye* (1908) as a 'strong safeguard' for the 'ignorant', but admitted that the 'foolish' would be unlikely to take his counsel.¹¹⁰ To protect readers of *Burrow's Guide to North Wales* (c.1923), Mrs Dora Benson omitted 'exceptionally severe' climbs from her guide to mountain walks and rock climbs in the region, and debates about risk continued into the 1930s as the reckless assaults of German climbers on Eiger-Nordwand were condemned by British climbers as a deadly symptom of nationalism.¹¹¹

Interactions between hosts and guests

The traces of interactions between hosts and guests are invariably one-sided accounts, narrated by travellers who tended to emphasise their authority and agency throughout the encounter. This led an earlier generation of scholars to understand the interaction of tourists and their hosts as a unilateral relationship in which power was wielded by the outsider who acted upon the host society in a way that damaged the local culture.¹¹² More recently, however, historians have come to recognise that, as well as being exploitative, host–guest interactions are better understood as a set of dialogues in which power and agency may be unequal but are wielded by both groups.¹¹³ In his study of tourism in Killarney, Kevin James shows that hosts 'exerted profound influence' on the way this region was experienced by tourists, honing performances that drew in part on Victorian cultural stereotypes of Ireland, satisfied the expectations of visitors, and ended in 'a request for loose change'.¹¹⁴ Synge noticed this on the Aran Islands, where locals played the 'ragged, humorous type ... once thought to represent the real peasant of Ireland'.¹¹⁵ Host cultures have adapted to new economic opportunities opened up by tourism, drawing attention to specific ethnic, regional or national cultural traits in a way that educates hosts and strengthens aspects of the local culture.¹¹⁶ To focus solely on exploitation and the anti-Irish attitudes of British tourists is, as Susan Kroeg has pointed out, to miss the moments when Irish hosts forged and also profited from their own 'touristic identity'.¹¹⁷

Detecting the agency of the host means reading between the lines of travel narratives that were typically choreographed to highlight the social and cultural superiority of the traveller. To this end, the kindly,

quick-witted, yet error-prone and uneducated host was a stock character, who provided comic relief while drawing attention to the narrator's historical or literary knowledge. At Tintagel, for example, C. Lewis Hind's 'amusingly ignorant' waiter struggled to carry on a conversation about Tennyson, and in the Hebrides Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell were entertained by two old men who had not heard of Dr Johnson.¹¹⁸ In Ireland, the American writer S. G. Bayne related several humorous anecdotes about the well-meaning but clumsy and 'comic boots' at the Slievemore Hotel, where, in absence of a racialised marker, Bayne's use of phonetic spelling for the host's speech signalled the cultural and social gap between them, in a light-hearted tone familiar to readers of *Punch Magazine*.¹¹⁹

The encounters were not always so one-sided, though, and travel writers were just as keen to relay interactions in which they had been pressured – often successfully – into parting with their money. Keen to display his awareness of the host's mischievous machinations, John Higinbotham related a scene where, on the way to Leenaun, the horse fell and the driver exaggerated the injuries, 'moaning out his dread of what "the boss" would do to him, largely for the purpose of increasing his tip, as we afterward ascertained'.¹²⁰ Now wise to such strategies, Higinbotham resisted another driver's pleas for extra payment after two shillings were handed over, and sent him away, 'grumbling but satisfied'.¹²¹ Bayne, who seemed to be continually fending off advances at the Slievemore Hotel, was offered the opportunity to purchase 'priceless' items such as stuffed birds and horns that the proprietor claimed were from Tibet,¹²² and on the morning of Bayne's departure the boots stole quietly into his room and 'soliloquised in a tender tone, suggestive of a tip if I should hear him':

'Sure, his honour is slapin' loike a baby, an' 'twould be nothin' short of a crime to wake him up this wet mornin'; I haven't the heart to do it'.¹²³

The most direct appeal came from the young women, or 'colleens', who surrounded tourists offering woollen socks and other wares for sale. During his 'Dash Through Connemara' (1881), Nugent Robinson's car was chased by two colleens for miles on the road between Galway and Clifden, their shortcuts through the bogs enabling them to 'intercept the vehicle on winding roads'. When they got close enough, they 'silently extended a couple of pairs of bluish-gray worsted stockings in mute appeal', and the driver told Robinson that they would follow all the way to Clifden for a shilling.¹²⁴ Rather than eluding the hosts, succumbing to the pressure became part of the tourist's stock experience in western Ireland. When faced with the peddling colleens, Noel Ruthven admitted he 'bought largely of their wares' during his ten day 'Dash through the Green Isle' in 1887,¹²⁵ and during his visit to the oratory of St Benan on Inis Mór, J. L. Cloud's young

guide 'strove by every possible artifice and argument ... to convince me that two shillings was the lowest possible sum I could offer him consistent with my own gentility and his services'. After giving him just a single shilling, the boy responded:

'If you'll add twopence,' he said, 'good luck will be with you; but if you don't, you'll be misfortunate for all the days of your life'.

Cloud gave in, handed over the twopence, and left the place 'in some fear of this indefatigably mercenary child'.¹²⁶

The subtler but equally effective agency of the hosts in shaping the traveller's experience was demonstrated by Nugent Robinson's driver. Before the journey even began, Robinson described how he secured the 'box-seat' in the lobster-car for the journey from Galway to Clifden by 'dexterously' placing a half-crown in the driver's hand.¹²⁷ Once they were on their way, the driver suggested a detour in characteristically rough Irish brogue:

'Would yer honor like for to taste a dhrop av rale potheen?' demanded the driver.

'Where could I get the genuine stuff?'

'Beyant here, at Garrybaldi's – no less'.¹²⁸

In this scene, related by Robinson, the tourist's authority is evident in the driver's deferent use of 'yer honor' and in the fact that the decision of whether or not to stop at Garrybaldi's small thatched cabin was his alone to make, despite there being 'ten or twelve' passengers in the car. Yet, the driver managed to divert the group to the rural inn, and they entered after 'a short colloquy between the driver and the proprietor'.¹²⁹

Tasting *poitín* – the illicit whiskey made in the countryside – was a well-established experience for travellers in Ireland, and the 'wild west' was described as its 'natural home'.¹³⁰ Much was made of the secrecy of the alcohol by the proprietor of Garrybaldi's, and Robinson's theatrical account described how 'the "blessed lickker" was brought forth with much show of care and secrecy'.¹³¹ Most of Robinson's tourist group 'spat the mountain dew out, declaring that it was nothing but bad Scotch whisky'. Robinson 'rather liked the peaty flavour', but was clearly suspicious of the provenance of the drink, and only felt that he had sampled 'genuine poteen' when he secured a 'golligogue' at the hotel in Leenaun.¹³² It is unclear from Robinson's account whether or not money was paid for the earlier dram of 'poteen', but it was customary to compensate the proprietor for his 'naggin' of liquor, and the driver probably would have been duly rewarded for bringing ten or twelve tourists into his bar.

Connemara was not quite as carnivalesque as Killarney, but there are many comparisons to be made. Robinson's interactions with his driver

were certainly subtler than the relentless hawking of the colleens and the pressure exerted by young guides, but they all constituted attempts made by locals to make their interactions with guests economically beneficial.¹³³ The experience of being cheated, and the attempts to resist, became an expectation for travellers in Ireland, which was exaggerated comically by Liam O'Flaherty in his *Tourist's Guide to Ireland* (1929). O'Flaherty warned that 'the tourist is at the mercy of every kind of ruffian', and the 'welcoming hands' held out for the tourist are 'for the purpose of robbing him of all he possesses'.¹³⁴ The hosts used the expectations of the tourists to their own advantage, to give the tourist the experiences of authenticity they so craved, while attempting to make this situation financially lucrative for themselves, and shaping in subtler ways the directions, detours and trajectories of the traveller's journey.

Finally, old men and young women completed the cast of characters in the west. Old men were associated with local history, folk stories and superstitious beliefs, which only a skilled traveller could tease out in conversation. Bradley managed to do so when visiting Llyn Morwynion, the Lake of the Maidens, which was named after a dark Welsh legend that told of a group of maidens who drowned themselves after being raped. As he fished the lake, 'rowed about by an old man from Ffestiniog', this 'bard' retold the story and 'saw great visions no doubt in the lake's dark depths as we drifted over its rippling surface'.¹³⁵ On the Aran Islands, J. M. Synge's knowledge of Gaelic gave him special insight into the local culture, and he listened to several stories told by Pat Dirane, the 'old man' and 'story-teller' who related his 'experiences of the fairies' and made Synge privy to 'a secret he had never yet told to any person in the world' about how to defend against them.¹³⁶ These interactions were jealously guarded by travellers, and when Lady Gregory visited the Aran Islands in 1898 she was frustrated to find 'another outsider walking here and there, talking also to the people'. The other outsider was Synge, who also 'looked on me [Gregory] as an intruder'.¹³⁷

As Chapter 2 discussed, Alexander Smith enjoyed listening to the tales of Cú Chulainn told by the 'old gentleman' Mr M'Ian amid the ruins of Dunscaith Castle, and Donaldson extracted 'a most amusing story' from an old man who remembered the attempts to capture the 'water-horse of Loch nan Dubrachan'.¹³⁸ In their encounters with old men and their stories, many travellers adopted the wariness of the folklorist, who understood that he might provide 'pleasant answers' or try to put 'the too-inquisitive Sassanach off the scent', as the Folk-Lore Society's former president Charlotte Sophia Burne put it in *The Handbook of Folklore* (1914).¹³⁹

The authenticity of conversing with old men also extended from the historical and folkloric to contemporary politics. Joseph and Elizabeth

Pennell spoke to an old man in Skye to gain first-hand information concerning the ongoing tensions between tenants and landlords. They asked the old man about the 'crofter question', who duly told them that he was a Land Leaguer, and that in the Glendale district 'not a crofter has paid rent for five years'.¹⁴⁰ Touristic interest in the dispute over land control also enabled crofters to present an alternative image of being mobilised and well organised, which challenged gendered and racialised depictions of them as placid ornaments in the surrounding landscape scenery.¹⁴¹

The old man was the main source of information during these interactions, but Catherine Scott also explained that the Cornish housewife might be persuaded to tell the traveller about having seen 'the pisky stealing away over the dewy fields by the first grey glimmer of light'.¹⁴² Age, however, seemed to be non-negotiable, as travellers emulated folklorists such as Jonathan Ceredig Davies, who was indebted to 'old men and women' in 'remote country districts' for his information on witches, wizards and death omens, while Marie Trevelyan also collected 'lore and stories' from 'old inhabitants' in Wales.¹⁴³

Both men and women romanticised the figure of the old man, but in descriptions of voiceless young women a discernible male gaze emerged.¹⁴⁴ Synge, for example, described an 'unbearably sultry day' on the Aran Islands, when the 'sand and the sea near us were crowded with half-naked women', and elsewhere he speculated that, when gathered together, the women of the Aran Islands were 'as wild and capricious as the women who live in towns'.¹⁴⁵ Robinson's voyeuristic gaze was drawn to the colleens, who he described as 'bare-legged, bare-shouldered', wearing 'the scantiest of petticoats', and collecting turf 'which was to warm their dainty toes – ay, their limbs were moulded in the daintiest fashion – during the coming Winter'.¹⁴⁶ As Wren Sidhe has noted, descriptions of flirtatious women and sexual frisson also extended to the way many men wrote about the landscape itself,¹⁴⁷ and Stone's experience of the changeable weather led him to remark that 'Connemara woos you as a coquettish maiden'.¹⁴⁸

Aside from these overtly sexualised descriptions of young women in western Ireland, women were more generally gazed upon as voiceless beauties. Travel writers tended to comment on women's clothing in Connemara and the Hebrides,¹⁴⁹ and Madame de Bovet looked upon a 'pretty' girl knitting in her cottage and, leaning 'idly against the door-post', looking out towards the sea 'with her great dark eyes'.¹⁵⁰ The 'perfect complexions, features, figure, and carriage' of young women prompted travel writers to draw comparisons with examples of archetypal beauty.¹⁵¹ In western Ireland, Morton was struck by a girl who 'was more primitive than Eve', and who 'had no idea that she was cast in the same mould as Helen of Troy'.¹⁵² Similarly, Dinah Craik described her guide on St Michael's Mount

as ‘perhaps the prettiest bit’ of the trip, and her grace was ‘worthy of one of the fair ladies worshipped by King Arthur’.¹⁵³

The women remained voiceless in travel accounts, though, as travellers gazed upon them and watched them work. MacCulloch romanticised working women of Skye who, he claimed, retained a ‘certain freshness which is not unpleasing’ despite the ‘excessive toils’ of their labour.¹⁵⁴ During her travels *From the Hebrides to the Himalayas* (1876), Constance F. Gordon Cumming also idealised the working women of Skye, who ‘can carry a fair burden for many a long mile’ and ‘across the steep hills up and down’, in a comparison with the Madras women who accompanied their soldiers to Bengal.¹⁵⁵ In contrast, Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell shunned the romanticisation of women and instead emphasised their poverty and back-breaking work. They described ‘old witch-like women and young girls’ who were ‘bent double under loads of peat or seaweed’. For these women there were ‘no smiles, no signs of contentment’, and only ‘a look of weariness and pain’.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, the silent and gazed-upon young women were also typecast as stereotypically consumerist, ‘whose eyes sparkled’ when the packman travelled into Cornwall and ‘offered to their vanity cloths and trifles from the distant town’, or when the ceannuighe (pedlar) arrived on the Aran Islands to sell ‘cheap knives and jewellery to the girls and younger women’.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Thinking about travel as performance sheds light on the ways in which identities were inscribed in space, and the rugged and dramatic landscapes of the west witnessed the traveller’s search for authenticity, which pervaded travel writing. In the west, these performances prized physical separation and cultural distinction from the tourist crowd and the beaten track. Moving through the landscape, recalling the past, experiencing danger and misadventure, and interacting with hosts were important parts of performing travel in the west, which revealed dominant narratives inflected by social class and gender while also providing the space for travellers to subvert them. This chapter has also shown that the encounters between hosts and guest were complex, revealing an unequal yet diffuse agency over the tourist’s experiences.

Many of these performances are common to travel writing across Britain and Ireland, but there was often a greater intensity of experience to be achieved in the west. The historical imagination was a significant performance in the traveller’s repertoire, involving expert interpretation of cromlechs, standing stones and castles, and this was especially

immersive in landscapes that became more deeply historical the further westwards one went. Geography mattered, too, and few journeys to the western edge were complete without an account of the danger and misadventure in the mountainous uplands and precipitous cliff-edges.

So far this book has followed travellers as they journeyed to the edge, gazed westwards towards the enchanting horizon, left the beaten track to experience danger and interacted with hosts. These were outward journeys, both physical and imaginative, but travellers also turned their gaze back towards home. The next chapter explores how, in the west, travellers articulated their responses to the rapid, destabilising and often bewildering transformations associated with industrial and urban modernity.

Notes

1. This term is taken from James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*.
2. James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*, 9; T. Edensor, 'Staging Tourism: Tourists as Performers', *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 2 (2000), 322–44, at 323–4.
3. J. Adler, 'Travel as Performed Art', *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 6 (1989), 1366–91, at 1366, 1383–5.
4. S. Kroeg, 'Cockney Tourists, Irish Guides, and the Invention of the Emerald Isle', *Éire-Ireland* 44, no. 3–4 (2009), 200–228, at 206; Edensor, 'Staging Tourism', 341–2.
5. James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*, 3.
6. Buzard, *Beaten Track*; D. MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 5th edn (Berkeley, CA, 2013).
7. B. Rieger and M. Daunton, 'Introduction', in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, ed. M. Daunton and B. Rieger (Oxford, 2001), 1–21, at 7–8.
8. Buzard, *Beaten Track*, 4.
9. Buzard, *Beaten Track*, 4–5, 6, 80–81.
10. *Black's North Wales* (1897), v–vi.
11. H. V. Morton, *In Search of Scotland*, 15th edn, London, 1931 [1929]), 256; M. Ferguson, *Rambles in Skye, with a Sketch of a Trip to St Kilda* (Glasgow, 1885), 85–6.
12. Gray [Speight], *View of Ireland* (1885), 28.
13. Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), v–vi, 1; E. Foster, 'Off the Beaten Track', *The Irish Monthly* 22, no. 254 (1894), 432–5, at 432.
14. James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*, 63. Stephen Gwynn described the area between Cong and Oughterard as 'far richer in antiquarian interest than Killarney, and infinitely less tourist-ridden'; see S. Gwynn, *Connaught* (London, 1912), 20.
15. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 130–31, 135, 436–85.
16. 'North American Scenery and the Yellowstone Park', *The Times*, 16 August 1883, 3–4. To the contrary, Bradley labelled Americans 'the most intelligent of travellers' in Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 134. Americans were also highly valued as a lucrative tourist market. The first issue of *Irish Travel* addressed 'complaints that Ireland has not been sufficiently advertised as a tourist resort this year in the United

States', and other issues provided itineraries of tours of western Connacht for American tourists; see 'Notes and News', *Irish Travel* 1, no. 1 (1925), 2–4; and 'Tours in Ireland: No. 1 series – For American Tourists Landing at Cobh', *Irish Travel* 1, no. 6 (1926), 126.

17. D. Matless, 'Moral Geographies of English Landscape', *Landscape Research* 22, no. 2 (1997), 141–55, at 141–3.

18. V. Cornish, *The Scenery of England: A Study of Harmonious Grouping in Town and Country* (Letchworth, 1932), 9–10; E. Shanks, *My England* (London, 1938), 76–7.

19. Shanks, *My England* (1938), 76–7.

20. Cornish, *Scenery of England* (1932), 11–12.

21. R. G. Stapledon, *The Hill Lands of Britain: Development or Decay?* (London, 1937), 84, 90–92.

22. GWR, *British Tyrol* (1906), 102.

23. Mothersole, *Isles of Scilly* (1910), 3.

24. Hind, *Days in Cornwall* (1907), 97, 158, 170.

25. A. K. Hamilton Jenkin, *Cornish Homes and Customs* (London, 1934), 224.

26. Morton, *In Search of England* (1931), 89–93.

27. Hudson, *Afoot in England* (1909), 3.

28. Lynd, *Rambles in Ireland* (1912), 15–16.

29. Bell, *Scotland's Rainbow West* (1933), 234–5, 240.

30. V. Purton and N. Page, *The Palgrave Literary Dictionary of Tennyson* (London, 2010), 48; A. L. Salmon, *Literary Rambles in the West of England* (London, 1906), 211–12; Morton, *In Search of England* (1931), 101.

31. A. D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1994), 10; J. A. Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York, 2004), see introduction; C. Bryant, A. Burns, and P. Readman, 'Introduction: Modern Walks', in *Walking Histories, 1800–1914*, ed. C. Bryant, A. Burns, and P. Readman (London, 2016), 3–4.

32. Lowerson, 'Battles for the Countryside', 268.

33. Hudson, *Afoot in England* (1909), 25–6.

34. Wallace, *Walking, Literature*, 13, 15.

35. E. Vale, 'A Welsh Walk', *Blackwood's Magazine* 195, no. 1180 (1914), 249–70, at 258–9.

36. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1927), 134–5.

37. J. J. Bell, *Scotland in Ten Days* (London, 1934), 172.

38. Mothersole, *Isles of Scilly* (1910), 8.

39. For motor itineraries in the case study areas, see *Michelin Guide to the British Isles* (London, 1913), 105–6, 107–8, 124–5, 125–6; and Thomas Cook, *How to See Great Britain. Escorted Motoring Tours* (1927), 10–11, 14–15, 22, 29, 31.

40. Thomas Cook, *How to See Great Britain* (1927), 14–15. For similar itineraries in western areas, see 10–11, 22, 29, 31.

41. Vale, 'Welsh Walk' (1914), 257–8.

42. E. Coulbert, '"The Romance of the Road": Narratives of Motoring in England', in *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland*, ed. B. Colbert (New York, 2012), 201–18, at 208.

43. F. A. Knight, *In the West Country* (Bristol, 1896), 259.

44. Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 11–12.
45. T. D. Murphy, *British Highways and Byways from a Motor Car* (Boston, MA, 1908), 5.
46. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 27.
47. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 27; Gold and Gold, *Imagining Scotland*, 124.
48. Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 63.
49. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 8; MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1927), xi.
50. S. G. Bayne, *On an Irish Jaunting Car through Donegal and Connemara* (New York, 1902), 93–4; S. P. B. Mais, *Oh! To Be in England: A Book of the Open Air* (London, 1922), 10; second quotation from Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 10.
51. Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 9–10, 63. John Cooke also noted that there was ‘not the same stringency on the part of the authorities in the enforcement of the Motor Act’; see J. Cooke, ‘Ireland as a Tourist Resort’, in W. T. Macartney-Filgate (ed.), *Irish Rural Life and Industry. With Suggestions for the Future* (Dublin, 1907), 13–22, at 18.
52. MacRae, *Guide to Skye* (1921), 39.
53. H. Quigley, *The Highlands of Scotland*, 2nd edn (London, 1939 [1936]), 13.
54. Rieger and Daunton, ‘Introduction’, 7–8.
55. Quotation from K. Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape, 1927–1955* (Oxford, 2007), 174–6; for walking and the historical imagination, see Readman, ‘Walking, and Knowing the Past’; D. Gange, ‘Retracing Trevelyan? Historical Practice and the Archive of the Feet’, *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 21, no. 3 (2017), 246–61, at 248–50; and T. Robinson, *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage* (London, 1990 [1986]), 64–5.
56. Robinson, *Little Gaelic Kingdom*, 380.
57. Smith was quoted in *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to the Highlands of Scotland*, 7th edn (London, n.d. [1931?]), 180.
58. Wakeman, *Picturesque Ireland* (c.1891), 302; A. Tierney, ‘The Gothic and the Gaelic: Exploring the Place of Castles in Ireland’s Celtic Revival’, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 8, no. 3 (2004), 185–98, at 185–7.
59. Murray’s *Cornwall* (1879), introduction, 14–15. Also see Piggott, *Burrow’s North Wales* (c.1923), facing 49; also see Lang, *Black’s Ireland* (1906), xxiv–xxv; Ward, *North Devon and North Cornwall* (1883), xv; Salmon, *Cornwall* (1925), 37.
60. T. O. Russell, *Beauties and Antiquities of Ireland* (London, 1897), 392.
61. Russell, *Beauties and Antiquities of Ireland* (1897), 393. For another example, at Dún Aonghasa, see Bayne, *On an Irish Jaunting Car* (1902), 110.
62. Wakeman, *Picturesque Ireland* (c.1891), 302.
63. Buzard, *Beaten Track*, 80–81.
64. Mais, *Oh! To Be in England* (1922), 91–3.
65. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (1936), 64.
66. The Romantic writers in turn drew on Radcliffe, Shakespeare, Spenser, as well as medieval and classical literature. See C. Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford, 2007), 1–8, 11–12.
67. E. Burke, *On the Sublime and Beautiful* (New York, 1885 [1757]), especially the sections ‘Sublime’, 23–33; ‘Passion Caused by the Sublime’, 50–51; ‘Terror’, 51–2; ‘Obscurity’, 52–3; ‘Power’, 58–65; ‘Magnificence’, 72–4; and ‘Colour’, 76–7.
68. A. R. H. Moncrieff and S. Palmer, *Scotland*, 2nd edn (London, 1922 [1904]), 163.

69. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1927), 132–3.
70. Quigley, *Highlands of Scotland* (1939), 67.
71. Bell, *Scotland's Rainbow West* (1933), 239–40.
72. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1927), 32–3.
73. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 177–8.
74. Burrow's *North Wales* (c.1923), 75–6, 83.
75. W. P. H. Smith and H. C. Hart, *Climbing in the British Isles*, vol. 2, *Wales and Ireland* (London, 1895), 165.
76. Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 2–3. For an example of this sentiment regarding Snowdon, see M. J. B. Baddeley and C. S. Ward (eds), *Thorough Guide Series. North Wales (part I)* (London, 1884), ix.
77. Quigley, *Highlands of Scotland* (1939), 67–9.
78. Burrow's *North Wales* (c.1923), 76. Also see R. M. Jones, 'The Mountaineering of Wales, 1880–1925', *Welsh History Review/Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru* 19, no. 1 (1998), 44–67, at 44.
79. Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 2–3. For an anecdote about the Lake District, see J. B. Priestley, 'Beauty of Britain', in *The Beauty of Britain*, ed. J. B. Priestley (London, 1935), 1–10, at 4–5.
80. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 300; R. Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England*, 3rd edn (London, 1881 [1865]), 15.
81. Shaw, *Guide to the London and North Western Railway* (1875), 152. Also see Smith and Hart, *Wales and Ireland* (1895), 158–60.
82. The angle was noted in Lang, *Black's Ireland* (1906), 233. The dramatic description of the mountain having been cut away is from Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), 274.
83. Lang, *Black's Ireland* (1906), 234.
84. Quotations from Quigley, *Highlands of Scotland* (1939), 67–9. Also see MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 144. For north Wales, see Burrow's *North Wales* (c.1923), 89–90.
85. *Black's Picturesque Tourist of Scotland*, 27th edn (Edinburgh, 1887), 440.
86. Scott, *Corners of Cornwall* (1911), vi.
87. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1927), 143–4. For a Welsh example, see H. I. Jenkinson, *Jenkinson's Practical Guide to North Wales*, 3rd edn (London, 1883), 217–18.
88. Somerville and Ross, *Through Connemara* (1893), 61.
89. C. Johnson, *The Isle of the Shamrock* (New York, 1901), 197–9; A. Corkey, *The Truth about Ireland, or Through the Emerald Isle with an Aeroplane* (London, 1910), 45–7. For masculinity and adventure in mountaineering, see Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 5–8; P. H. Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering after the Enlightenment* (Cambridge MA, 2013); P. H. Hansen, 'Albert Smith, the Alpine Club and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 3 (1995), 300–324.
90. Quoted in R. Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: The History of a Fascination* (London, 2003), 85–6.
91. T. White, 'Camped Out under the Cuillins', *Blackwood's Magazine* 146, no. 886 (1889), 211–22, at 215.
92. Vale, 'Welsh Walk' (1914), 261.

93. H. V. Morton, *The Call of England* (New York, 1936), 16.
94. Murray's *Scotland* (1883), 410. For relational masculinities, see M. Roper and J. Tosh, 'Introduction: Historians and the Politics of Masculinity', in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. M. Roper and J. Tosh (London, 1991), 1–24, at 1, 13.
95. F. Watt and A. Carter, *Picturesque Scotland: Its Romantic Scenes and Historical Associations Described by Lay and Legend, Song and Story* (London, 1887), 505.
96. White, 'Camped Out' (1889), 219.
97. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains*, 101–41; quotation from 5–6.
98. Mme De Bovet, *Three Months' Tour in Ireland*, trans. and ed. Mrs A. Walter (London, 1891), 241–2.
99. Pennell and Pennell, *Journey to the Hebrides* (1889), 142–3.
100. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 143–4.
101. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 123–5 for the cave; 146–7 for Harta Corrie.
102. Mitton, *Cornwall* (1915), 67–8.
103. Craik, *Unsentimental Journey* (1883), 110–16.
104. Craik, *Unsentimental Journey* (1883), 142–3.
105. Craik, *Unsentimental Journey* (1883), 143.
106. Smith and Hart, *Wales and Ireland* (1895), 165.
107. Vale, 'Welsh Walk' (1914), 267.
108. Craik, *Unsentimental Journey* (1883), 71–2.
109. A. Burns, 'Accidents Will Happen: Risk, Climbing and Pedestrianism in the "Golden Age" of English Mountaineering, 1850–1865', in *Walking Histories, 1800–1914*, ed. C. Bryant, A. Burns, and P. Readman (London, 2016), 165–94, quotations at 166, 191–4.
110. A. P. Abraham, *Rock Climbing in Skye* (London, 1908), p. xviii.
111. D. Benson, 'Mountain Walks and Rock Climbs in North Wales', in P. J. Piggott, ed., *Burrow's Guide to North Wales*, ed. P. J. Piggott (Cheltenham, n.d. [c.1923]), 78–104; Burns, 'Accidents Will Happen', 166, 191–4.
112. R. Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy* (Philadelphia, 1976); V. L. Smith, 'Introduction', in *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, ed. V. L. Smith, 2nd edn (Philadelphia, 1989 [1977]), 1–17.
113. James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*, 151–2. Some scholars have questioned the binary categories of 'host' and 'guest' themselves, recognising the ways in which these groups can overlap, and acknowledging the shared experiences of locals and tourists. See K. Sherlock, 'Revisiting the Concept of Hosts and Guests', *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 3 (2001), 271–95, at 271–2, 287.
114. James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*, 61–2.
115. Synge, *Aran Islands* (1907), 128.
116. Kroeg, 'Cockney Tourists, Irish Guides', 207.
117. Kroeg, 'Cockney Tourists, Irish Guides', 227–8.
118. Hind, *Days in Cornwall* (1907), 97; Pennell and Pennell, *Journey to the Hebrides* (1889), 63.
119. Bayne, *On an Irish Jaunting Car* (1902), 105. For the use of phonetic spelling in the absence of racial differences, see James, *Tourism, Land, and Landscape*, 73. For

- Punch Magazine*, see C. Keene et al., *Mr Punch in the Highlands* (London, n.d. [1910?]).
120. Higinbotham, *In the British Isles* (1911), 235.
 121. Higinbotham, *In the British Isles* (1911), 241.
 122. Bayne, *On an Irish Jaunting Car* (1902), 78–80.
 123. Bayne, *On an Irish Jaunting Car* (1902), 73.
 124. Robinson, ‘Through Connemara’ (1881), 281–2.
 125. Noel Ruthven, ‘A Dash through the Green Isle’, *Frank Leslie’s Sunday Magazine* 22, no. 5 (1887), 373–82, at 381.
 126. Cloud, ‘The Arran Islands’ (1880–81), 511.
 127. The lobster-car was an ‘overgrown outside jaunting-car, capable of containing eight or ten persons on each side’. Robinson, ‘Through Connemara’ (1881), 280.
 128. Robinson, ‘Through Connemara’ (1881), 282.
 129. Robinson, ‘Through Connemara’ (1881), 282.
 130. For an entertaining account of a ‘poteen-hunter’, who took the reader on a trip to ‘catch men making it’, see ‘Poteen-hunting in the Wild West of Ireland’, *Chambers’s Journal* 2, no. 100 (1899), 761–3.
 131. Robinson, ‘Through Connemara’ (1881), 282–3.
 132. Robinson, ‘Through Connemara’ (1881), 282–3.
 133. For examples of begging, see Johnson, *Isle of the Shamrock* (1901), 158, 162–3, 165; and Synge, *Connemara* (1911), 160–61. For an account expressing surprise at the lack of begging in Connacht, see Stevenson, *Charm of Ireland* (1914), 375.
 134. L. O’Flaherty, *A Tourist’s Guide to Ireland* (London, 1929), 5–8. O’Flaherty also suggested the tourist might be charged by customs officers for ‘taking away on his shoes some of the country’s mud’.
 135. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 90–91.
 136. Synge, *Aran Islands* (1907), quotation from 46–7, also see 17–18, 18–24, 33–5, 51–7, 62–4, 75.
 137. Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London, 1913), 120–21.
 138. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 112.
 139. C. S. Burne, *The Handbook of Folklore* (London, 1914), 15.
 140. Pennell and Pennell, *Journey to the Hebrides* (1889), 151–2. Michael Davitt wrote about attempts to extend Land League propaganda into the Highlands and the Isle of Skye, areas that were toured by the propagandist Edward McHugh; see M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, or the Story of the Land League Revolution* (London, 1904), 228.
 141. Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland*, 176. Grenier, “Scottishness”, “Britishness”, 1010. Also see M. Padget, ‘An Iconography of Difference: Internal Colonialism, Photography, and the Crofters of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland’, *College Literature* 20, no. 2 (1993), 177–95. For preconceptions of crofters as ‘placid’ parts of the surrounding scenery, see A. Newby, ‘Land and the “Crofter Question” in Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, *International Review of Scottish Studies* 35 (2010), 7–36, at 7.
 142. Scott, *Corners of Cornwall* (1911), 87.
 143. Davies, *Folklore of West and Mid-Wales*, vii; M. Trevelyan, *Folk-Lore and Folk-Stories of Wales* (London, 1909), vi; for stories collected from old men in Wales, see 14, 67, 68, 122, 180, 106, 239.

144. For the male gaze and tourism, see A. Pritchard and N. J. Morgan, 'Privileging the Male Gaze: Gendered Tourism Landscapes', *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, no. 4 (2000), 884–905, especially the conclusion, 899–901. For the 'male gaze', see L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), reprinted in R. Warhol-Down and D. Price Herndl, *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2009), 436–40.
145. Synge, *Aran Islands* (1907), 50, 80. For further comment, see S. G. Mattar, *Primitivism, Science and the Irish Revival* (Oxford, 2004), 136–7.
146. Robinson, 'Through Connemara' (1881), 282, 285.
147. Wren Sidhe has commented on Morton's representation of the 'feminised English soil'; see W. Sidhe, 'H. V. Morton's Pilgrimages to Englishness', *Literature and History* 12, no. 1 (2003), 57–71.
148. Stone, *Connemara* (1906), 2.
149. Stone, *Connemara* (1906), 329; De Bovet, *Tour in Ireland* (1891), 208; Pennell and Pennell, *Journey to the Hebrides* (1889), 33.
150. Bates, *Gretna Green to Land's End* (1908), 370; De Bovet, *Tour in Ireland* (1891), 214.
151. Stone, *Connemara* (1906), 328–9. Stone also quoted from Tennyson, *Maud, and Other Poems* (London, 1855), 101–13 when describing the beauty of Achill women.
152. Morton, *In Search of Ireland* (1932), 186.
153. Craik, *Unsentimental Journey* (1883), 102.
154. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1927), 201–2.
155. C. F. G. Cumming, *From the Hebrides to the Himalayas*, vol. 2 (London, 1876), 182.
156. Cumming, *Hebrides to the Himalayas* (1876), 146–7.
157. H. V. Morton, *In Search of England*, 21st edn (London, 1934 [1927]), 97; Synge, *Aran Islands* (1907), 125. For gender and consumerism, see R. Bowlby, *Shopping with Freud* (London, 1993), 62, and A. J. Hammerton, 'The English Weakness? Gender, Satire and "Moral Manliness" in the Lower Middle Class, 1870–1920', in *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800–1940*, ed. A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (Manchester, 1999), 164–82, at 164–5.

Chapter 5

Looking back – modernity and the west

The transformations associated with modernity varied across the world and have produced a variety of ‘modernities’.¹ The British and Irish experience of these transformations is often located in the period 1870–1940, when the infrastructural and technological developments outlined in [Chapter 1](#) intensified, changing the way people travelled and how they understood and narrated their journeys.² Bernhard Rieger and Martin Dauntton associate technological development with the growing eminence of scientific and secular authority at the expense of religious elites, and Stephen Kern suggested that rapid changes in technology and culture reached a crescendo in the period 1880–1914, when the telephone, wireless telegraph, cinema, bicycle, automobile and aeroplane generated new experiences of both space and time.³ Mass politics emerged through successive electoral reforms in 1867, 1884, 1918 and 1928 while rapid urbanisation and suburbanisation, ever-expanding industrial capitalism, and the increasingly powerful and bureaucratic modern nation state altered life at work and at home, which fed anxieties about alienating and mundane urban and suburban life and prompted debates about increasingly ‘unstable gender hierarchies’.⁴ In addition, popular entertainment, leisure and culture were shaped by mass media and commercialisation for a literate society following Education Acts in the 1870s and 1880s, and the scramble for imperial expansion and military supremacy with European rivals encouraged popular imperialism but also prompted concerns about the decline of Britain, especially in the overcrowded towns and cities where the spectre of degeneration loomed.⁵ As Marshall Berman explained in the expansive introduction of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (1982), the transformations of modernity provoked bewilderment, disorientation and a consciousness of living through a distinctly modern time characterised by

continuous change. The increased tempo of life caused a sense of dislocation from the past, and in response people looked for new ways to anchor the present in history.⁶

This chapter argues that the west became a key site for both the discussion of opportunities and the expression of anxieties associated with the transformations of modernity. Firstly, the language of improvement and deficiency echoed the colonial discourse of British imperial destiny, as travellers drew attention to the under-developed industries of Connemara and the poverty of the crofters in Skye, and considered how industry and prosperity could be brought to the west.⁷ In north Wales, by contrast, large-scale industries were well established in the heart of the mountains, and the imagery of rural, upland landscapes was used to promote engineering projects, seaside-town water supplies and hydropathic tourism. Second, western regions and the supposed physical and moral qualities of the people were described with urban slums, moral degeneration and national fitness in mind in the decades before 1914. Apparently unchanged western landscapes had the potential to reinvigorate the culture and spirit of the nation because isolation had protected the people from the degenerative effects of modernity. Third, in the early twentieth century, the language of industry and degeneration shifted to discussions of commercialism, mass culture and suburbanisation. On Skye and in the west of Ireland travellers sought remoteness from the sedentary and repetitive nature of modern work and the perceived artificiality of modern life, whereas the encroachment of suburban architecture, the commercial tourism industry, motor transport and other emblems of modernity were more difficult to avoid in Cornwall and north Wales.

Industry, poverty and the language of improvement

Western regions, especially in Ireland and Scotland, offered the tourist the chance to experience remoteness from what one guidebook described as 'the bustle and worries of business, and the murky atmospheric conditions of the crowded town'.⁸ However, at the same time, guidebooks and travel writing reported on the under-development of resources and unrealised economic potential of the west. *Murray's Ireland* (1902), for instance, described the economic 'backwardness' of the country caused by the subdivision of smallholdings, the difficulties of the land tenure system, and 'primitive and unscientific' methods of cultivation.⁹ Galway was a particularly egregious example of under-development, with its fisheries 'in a languishing condition', according to *Black's Ireland* (1885), despite the fishing grounds being 'as good as any in the kingdom'.¹⁰ Galway also boasted

natural advantages that made it the ideal location for a deep-sea port, but this was notable as another example of unfulfilled industrial and commercial potential.¹¹

For many travellers, economic development was the remedy for the poverty and desolation they saw in the west.¹² In Connemara, Frederick Verney was struck by the barrenness of the land and signs of the ‘yearly recurring struggle for existence’, including the ‘minute holdings’ and ‘hovels’ that dotted the countryside between Galway and Cashla Bay.¹³ For Stone, the ‘solitary grandeur’ of the scenery around Lough Inagh was conspicuous for its lack of life, and he lamented that there were ‘no cabins, no people, no children, no happy signs of industry, of cultivation, prosperity’.¹⁴ These were uncomfortable silences and absences evoking emigration and famine, which pervaded many descriptions of western Ireland. Some of the absences were temporary, such as the young men and women of Achill Island who, A. J. Hayes explained during his 1894 visit, migrated to England and Scotland for seasonal work.¹⁵

The subject of investment and improvement gained momentum around the turn of the twentieth century, when hopes were raised by the Agricultural Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act (1899), which established the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in the following year.¹⁶ Moreover, travel books were an important source of information, especially for the British reading public, on the activities of the Congested Districts Board, created in 1891 to improve conditions in western Ireland by working to prevent potato disease and assist with tree cultivation, livestock breeding, poultry farming, tweed and cloth weaving, and road building. Many of the designated districts were located on the northern coast of Galway Bay,¹⁷ and the guidebooks mined the Board’s official Annual Report for information to fill their introductory pages,¹⁸ while texts such as Stephen Gwynn’s *Highways and Byways in Donegal and Antrim* (1899) were praised for their informative passages on the work of the Board.¹⁹ S. G. Bayne even secured an interview with W. J. D. Walker, Inspector Organiser of Industries for the Congested Districts Board.²⁰

Travel books drew readers’ attention to specific improvements that had been effected by the Board, such as the development of the fishing industry at Kilonan on Inis Mór,²¹ the replacement of traditional currachs with larger vessels, and the establishment of a curing station at Killeany (also on Inis Mór).²² Elsewhere, the Board established a station for deep-sea fishing at Roundstone, and at Streamstown *Murray’s Ireland* (1906) praised the Board for its development of the mackerel fishing industry.²³ Inland, travel writers and guidebooks commented on the powers of the Board to ‘condemn and purchase at a fair valuation the fertile land’ of the great landowners, reselling it to the tenants at favourable rates.²⁴ In particular,

Clare Island set an example for how this might be implemented. There, explained *Black's Ireland* (1906), the division of farm work was replaced by 'an organised tenure, by which certain lands are allotted to each tenant', which Stephen Gwynn claimed was 'one of the best examples of the Congested Districts Board's beneficent work' in the area.²⁵ Plans made by the Board were not always carried through, though, and Synge remained frustrated at the neglected kelp industry, while Stone called on the Board to construct a 'pier or landing-stage' at Dooagh (the most westerly village on Achill Island) which, he claimed, along with 'an inexpensive storm-wall', would transform the fishing from 'spasmodic and desultory' into 'an important industry'.²⁶ Optimism was often tempered by the recognition that, as *Murray's Ireland* (1906) put it, 'much yet remains to be done'.²⁷

Similarly, Skye's remoteness and solitude prompted travel writers to reflect on the poverty of the crofters and their restricted access to pastureland since the introduction of sheep farming during the Highland Clearances. This brought an end, explained MacCulloch, to the 'shieling days' when the township 'migrated to the hill pasture with their sheep and cattle', and the arable ground still available to the people was 'subject to the ravages of game' such as deer and grouse.²⁸ Ferguson found some hope in the successful woollen manufactory in Portree, and called for 'some of the successful sons of Skye' who had made fortunes abroad to return and invest, so that the island might enjoy employment, 'welfare', and 'prosperity'.²⁹ However, the answer was not necessarily industrial development. Instead, Ferguson called for a resolution to the disputes between the crofters and their landlords regarding access to grazing land and fixity of tenure, without which, Ferguson acknowledged, there was no incentive for the crofters to make improvements to their 'wretched-looking hovels', because they could simply be ejected the following year.³⁰

As [Chapter 1](#) discussed, some travellers followed in the footsteps of the Napier Commission (1883) to collect stories about the Crofters' War from the inhabitants of the seldom-visited Glendale district, and to report on the effects of the Crofters Holdings Act (1886). Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell remained committed to their self-appointed responsibility to investigate the social and economic conditions of the crofters, but they were dismayed by the response of certain critics. Having set out to discover 'the actual condition of the population', the Pennells eschewed the beaten track of 'civilised society' where, they wrote, rich tourists stayed in comfortable hotels and 'ignored' the crofters. Instead, they described 'the misery of the people', but for dwelling on the subject of poverty they were labelled 'sickly sentimentalists' by some of their readers. Perhaps, they wondered, that instead of honest accounts, their critics preferred 'second-hand descriptions' of fashionable places that might have been written from home or

manufactured in the British Museum.³¹ The Pennells, in seeking to write an authentic and original account of Skye, seemingly diverted too far from the well-established myths of the west that some of their readers expected. While hyperbole might entertain in accounts of dangerous mountain descents and rough sea crossings, vivid descriptions of destitution or of politically contentious issues such as the Highland Clearances could be dismissed as sentimentalism. It was in this manner that Geraldine Mitton accused MacLeod – who discussed the Clearances from the crofters' perspective in *Gloomy Memories in the Highlands* (1840–41) – of painting a 'lurid picture' that was 'too highly coloured to carry much conviction'.³²

In some texts, the language of deficiency and improvement perpetuated a colonial discourse that developed in Highland Scotland in the aftermath of the '45 and was energised in the years following the Great Famine (1845–52) in Ireland.³³ Applying David Spurr's concept of 'negation' to the language of improvement and deficiency in mid-nineteenth-century Connemara, William H. A. Williams explained that, as a narrative technique, negation pulled the landscapes of western Ireland and the Scottish Highlands 'into the perceptive domain of the writer' and claimed it as territory for the coloniser who would realise the economic potential of the land, which the natives had failed to do.³⁴ This often relied on the racial stereotype of the Celt as inherently 'lazy', and who therefore required the help of the naturally 'industrious' Saxon.³⁵ Exponents of this theory included John Pinkerton, who in 1787 described the Celts of Wales, Ireland and Scotland as 'incapable of industry or civilization', and John Harvey Ashworth, who encouraged the English to invest and settle in the 'Sister Island' in *The Saxon in Ireland* (1851).³⁶ The opening of Ashworth's book is particularly revealing, and it takes the form of a conversation between the author, his wife, and their friend, the curate of the parish. It is the curate who urges Ashworth to go, because Ireland requires 'an admixture of Saxon habits and feelings' and 'English capital' to make the most of the 'rich vales and green hills of Erin', which had been nothing but 'a millstone round the neck of the sister island'.³⁷ Opportunities to invest in Irish land grew with the establishment of the Encumbered Estates Court in 1849, which helped to sell the estates of landowners in financial difficulties caused by the Great Famine.³⁸ Ashworth was initially reluctant to take up the call and claimed that the 'solitude' of the North American forests, the 'chill air' of Canada, and the 'sultry winds' of South Africa would be far easier to endure than the 'poverty, the squalidness, the degradation of the lower orders in Ireland'. In contrast to the 'heartless' Celt or Milesian landowner, who 'may calmly view from the windows of his mansion, or the gates of his park, scenes of wretchedness', the Saxon would 'sacrifice his all, nay, even his life, in the endeavour to remedy such a fearful condition

of society'. Far from being grounds to avoid Ireland, the curate accepted Ashworth's summary of the country, and the differences between the Celt and the Saxon, suggesting that these were the very reasons he needed to go and settle, invest and develop.³⁹

The racial stereotypes of 'lazy' Celt and 'industrious' Saxon, and Ashworth's colonial discourse, lived on in Harry Speight's *A Tourist's View of Ireland* (1885), in which the author perceived the land in terms of its economic potential as he travelled westwards. Speight was struck by the 'affluence of the landscape' and, between Westport and Leenaun, he marvelled at the 'thousands of acres of untenanted prairie'. However, the 'fair face' of the land was marred by 'irreconcilable freckles' – the 'squalid hovels of the peasantry'. Speight travelled through Ireland after the Land Act (1881), which provided fixity of tenure and offered a route to a reduction of rents through the Land Court. For these reasons, Speight argued, 'there is now really no valid excuse for a continuance of this shippen mode of existence'. From Speight's perspective, the real problem was that 'there is still something lamentably unavailing in the Irishman's nature'. Among the deficiencies he listed 'sloth and natural inaptitude', 'ignorance', 'bad workmanship' and 'bad packing' that ruined the potatoes for export. Land reform could only do so much, and Speight went so far as to suggest that even if the land were rent free, soon 'the same evils of famine' would affect the people. Those who cited the prosperity of 'Ulster tenants' and 'the thrifty little farmers of France and Holland' failed to see what Speight could – that 'their habits and character differ as widely from these people as the sun does from the moon'. The answer was to replace the bad tenants with 'thrifty, industrious men', and to make sure that this 'fertile country' was 'made to yield better results in the right hands'. Ireland needed 'civilising influences' and 'capital to make the most of her soil'.⁴⁰

Speight was not alone in blaming Irish temperament for the dearth of industry in the west. J. L. Joynes met several landlords in Dublin who denounced the 'idleness of the Irish', and at Cong Captain Charles Boycott – the infamous land agent whose name became associated with the Land League's tactic of isolating the landowners' representatives during the Land War – insisted that 'the peasants were all utterly idle'.⁴¹ Such accusations were not the preserve of landlords and their agents, though. The American author and photographer Clifton Johnson thought that the land in Connemara appeared 'tilled neither energetically nor carefully', while the French travel writer and novelist Madame de Bovet suggested that Irish peasants were 'lacking in some quality essential to prosperity'.⁴² Examples in travel writing are numerous, and include Charles Whympers's accusation that the Irish peasantry lacked 'steady purpose, real perseverance, and love of labour', and Stone's fear that the work of the Congested Districts

Board might ‘destroy the spirit of enterprise and plucky endeavour which makes nations’.⁴³ Even guidebooks such as *Black’s Ireland* (1906), which usually made claims to neutrality, described Ireland as the land ‘where no one is in a hurry’, especially ‘the Hibernian agriculturalist’.⁴⁴

Moreover, the laziness of the Celt was not just an Irish problem. The ‘Skyeman’, too, claimed MacCulloch, ‘is incredibly lazy’ and represented an ‘enfeebled and dying race’.⁴⁵ In a somewhat sceptical remark about the Crofters’ Holdings Act (1886), which secured fixity of tenure for the crofters, MacCulloch concluded that ‘moderate prosperity’ was now within reach of ‘all who were active enough to strive for it’.⁴⁶ Such rhetoric was more widespread around the turn of the twentieth century, but as late as 1939 travel writers such as Hugh Quigley perpetuated the notion that the crofters of Skye, being ‘used to little and not expecting much’, would ‘not labour greatly to make sour land sweet’.⁴⁷

Apparent evidence for the dichotomy of the ‘industrious’ Saxon and the ‘lazy’ Celt could be found everywhere, not just in the landscape but also in the design of everyday objects. Havelock Ellis drew attention to the different type of spade used in the Celtic west in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon east. The common Anglo-Saxon spade was ‘a short, powerful implement with a large oblong blade, and a cross-piece at the end of the handle’. This spade was ‘not an elegant instrument’, but it was ‘well adapted to obtain a maximum output of energy from arms and back and legs’. The spade represented Ellis’s Anglo-Saxon – efficient and practical, but unimaginative and inelegant. In contrast, the ‘Cornish spade – also found in Wales and Ireland – is often as long as its owner, with a slender, slightly curved handle and a small heart-shaped blade’. This was ‘a graceful instrument’ adapted to Cornwall’s shallow soil but also ‘to the lithe, slow, free movements of the Cornishmen’. As verification of this assessment, Ellis quoted Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch when concluding that the Cornish ‘possess a characteristic which has lovingly been described by a child of the land as a “divine laziness”’.⁴⁸

While travel writers pondered the deficiencies of the Celt, the guidebooks celebrated the work of enterprising Britons who invested in western Ireland in the decades after the Famine, answering the call to ‘make the backward regions of the world hum with industry and bloom with cultivation’.⁴⁹ In Letterfrack, for instance, the Quaker and Leicester manufacturer James Ellis matched his ‘philanthropic efforts’ after the Famine with a series of improvements made to what was previously ‘a waste of sparsely cultivated land’.⁵⁰ Ellis ‘built a neat village’, as well as a police-barracks and schools, ‘besides draining and planting a very large portion of moorland’.⁵¹ As a result of his perseverance, concluded *Black’s Ireland* (1877), ‘that which was a wilderness has become a garden’, and

the 'rude and unlettered' people received 'an amount of enlightenment altogether unknown before in the district'.⁵² In the 1860s, the Manchester-born merchant of Irish descent Mitchell Henry purchased around 14,000 acres of land at Kylemore, and set about building his own castle and making improvements while serving as MP for Galway between 1871 and 1885.⁵³ Speight visited Kylemore Castle, and looked upon 'meadow and arable land of the most productive character', which had been transformed from an 'unproductive barrenness' of 'unclaimed bog and mountain land' thanks to Henry's 'persevering industry and a large amount of hired labour'. Speight's description of this 'Protestant', 'amidst the crudest Catholic surroundings', is the embodiment of Ashworth's Saxon in Ireland. Henry had become the 'uncrowned king of this fair domain', the 'avowed idol of the district' and 'a benefactor to the neighbourhood of no ordinary kind'.⁵⁴

The contents of guidebooks changed markedly from the 1920s. As conspicuous symbols of colonial oppression and conquest, almost 300 of Ireland's Big Houses were occupied, burned and destroyed by republicans during the Irish Revolution.⁵⁵ Correspondingly, post-partition guidebooks were purged of celebratory passages about enterprising Britons that filled the pages of earlier texts. Much remained the same, of course, including the tone of optimism regarding the economic development of places such as Galway.⁵⁶ But information on Big House owners at Clifden, Renvyle and Leenaun was omitted from Irish Tourist Association guidebooks such as *Connacht* (1932), and in D. L. Kelleher's *It's Ireland!* (1932) the narrative around Mitchell Henry focused instead on the fact that he 'married an Irishwoman and became an advocate for Home Rule'.⁵⁷

Even in earlier travel writing, not everyone looked to race or character to explain the barriers to economic prosperity in western Ireland and in Skye. Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell emphasised the crofters' lack of incentive to make improvements without the fixity of tenure that had only been secured in 1886, and Cumming declared it 'unjust' to call the people of the Hebrides 'idle', insisting that 'many are hard-working'.⁵⁸ Equally, in a report of his visit to Connemara, Frederick Verney held up the relief works introduced by Major Gaskell in 1880 as evidence that the people could 'win their way from poverty by work', should the opportunity arise. In a period of four weeks, around 3,000 men worked in gangs of 60 and constructed over 30 miles of village roads, with 100 stone-built gullets or watercourses, as well as '31 rough village piers for fishing-boats', behind which 'the boats now lie in perfect shelter'.⁵⁹ Even Speight acknowledged that Ireland's industries had been 'thwarted and oppressed' by 'English misrule', and he could no longer deny the capabilities of Irish workers after Mitchell Henry showed him the ceilings, panelling and 'carefully-executed

mouldings' of Kylemore Castle, which were carved from oak and 'finished with the most perfect care and judgment'. Speight's earlier dismissal of the Irish as ignorant turned into an admission that 'the rude Irish peasant has a naturally sound head, but lacks the opportunities of rational advancement'.⁶⁰ Finally, in *Irish Distress and Its Remedies* (1880), the Quaker philanthropist James Hack Tuke took issue with the guidebooks' triumphant narratives about English improvers, pointing out that, despite the presence of such enterprising proprietors, '600 out of 750 families in the district which includes Kylemore were upon the Relief lists'.⁶¹

In north Wales, by contrast, industry thrived in the heart of the mountains. Industrialisation in Wales is often associated with the coal, copper, tin-plate and steel industries of the south-east, but an image of a remote and undeveloped north-west would have been unrecognisable to travellers who encountered the slate quarries.⁶² The sights and sounds of industry spoiled A. G. Bradley's experience of Llyn Padarn, and at Llyn Peris he looked with sadness on the 'lacerated' shoulder of Elidyr Fawr, where quarrying exposed 'the entrails of this great mountain':

one might well fancy it groaning in its agony, for all the ceaseless and horrid din, the rattle of trucks, the shout of countless men, who swarm like ants along the giddy heights, the crash of falling rocks, the creaking of machinery, the roar of blasting, and when a brief interval of silence admits it, the dull splash of some avalanche of loosened debris toppling into the lake.⁶³

Bradley's encounter with industry was one of lamentation and horror, but it does not reflect the full range of responses in travel literature. The guidebooks celebrated the 'extensive shipping trade' of Porthmadog, which, the Cambrian Resorts Association noted, transported 'thousands of tons of the famous Festiniog slates' around the world.⁶⁴ *Black's North Wales* (1883), too, expressed 'astonishment at the commercial enterprise' of the Penrhyn slate quarries near Bangor, which 'transformed these mountain-wastes into sources of industrious occupation, private wealth, and national prosperity'. Bradley's description of 'damage', 'laceration' and 'agony' became 'the loud hum of busy life and industry', which supported 'not fewer than 11,000 individuals', once the wives and children of the workers had been accounted for, and tourists were encouraged to visit the quarries by coach from the Railway Hotel in Bangor.⁶⁵ O. J. R. Howarth's balanced assessment was typical of the interwar planner-preservationist mindset, acknowledging that the slate quarries in the Snowdon massif were ugly, and 'the harnessing of water-power for the supply of electricity has required that pylons and wires should bestride the countryside', while insisting '[t]he possibility of foregoing such industrial development

and the use of natural power is not arguable', and calling on proper planning for 'mitigating their effects on natural beauty' in the future.⁶⁶

In fact, rural landscapes and the infrastructure of industrial modernity came together in the promotion of new water supplies, as engineers and municipal leaders in Birmingham and Liverpool exploited rural, mountainous landscape imagery to suggest wild, primitive and timeless purity. Between 1880 and 1892, the Lake Vyrnwy reservoir system was constructed to supply Liverpool with water, and the Elan Valley system was built by the Birmingham Corporation from the 1890s.⁶⁷ In 1881, the Mayor of Liverpool claimed that the mountainous landscape of north Wales, 'hidden away' from 'the hum of civilisation', boasted water of 'crystal purity' that would bring 'health and prosperity to our people', and similar imagery was used in pamphlets issued by the Liverpool Corporation in 1892.⁶⁸ The associations between Welsh water, purity and health were seized on by guidebooks, which targeted urban-dwelling tourists from Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and other industrial towns in north-west England. Ward and Lock's guidebook to *North Wales (Northern Section)* (1909) understood that 'Drainage and Water Supply are matters of vital concern to intending visitors', at a time when the threat of diseases such as cholera and typhoid haunted densely populated towns and cities.⁶⁹ Outbreaks of cholera occurred intermittently in nineteenth-century Britain, including in 1831–2, 1848–9, 1853–4, 1865, 1866, 1892, and 1893,⁷⁰ and guidebooks emphasised the purity of water supplies in tourist resorts by drawing readers' attention to the altitude of the water source, and its endorsement by medical professionals. Llandudno, explained one guidebook, was supplied by Llyn Dulyn, 'a precipice-girt lake near Carnedd Llewelyn, abundant and pure',⁷¹ and another boasted that scientific and modern works costing £136,000 ensured that 'there is probably no better drained town in the kingdom'. Furthermore, Professors Frankland and Wanklyn had pronounced the town's water supply 'to be purer than even that of the celebrated Loch Katrine, which supplies Glasgow'.⁷² Elsewhere, descriptions of water supplies at Penmaenmawr, Pwllheli, Nefyn, Old Colwyn and Llanfairfechan all emphasised the purity of the Welsh mountain water, drawn from 'unpolluted streams from unfailing springs'.⁷³

At Trefriw, the water was not merely pure but fortified with iron and sulphur. This was chalybeate spring water, and it came highly recommended by guidebooks citing 'strong medical testimony'.⁷⁴ Ward and Lock's *North Wales (Northern Section)* (1912) went to great lengths to entice tourists to the waters, apparently the 'richest sulphur-iron waters in the world' that collected in 'rock-hewn basins supposed to be of Roman origin'. The source of the water lay in a cave that was blocked by debris and

rediscovered in 1833 with the aid of ‘an aged inhabitant, in whose memory lingered stories of cures effected by the water’. Having been fully commercialised, the tourist visiting during the 1912 season could purchase a glass for 2d. and enjoy ‘the most modern hydropathic appliances’ in the pump house and baths. If the modern conveniences and atmospheric backstory were not enough to entice the tourist, the guidebook cited a letter written in 1907 by Dr John W. Hayward, M. D., who recommended the waters for chronic stomach and liver conditions, anaemia, rheumatism ‘and such-like ailments’, while Dr Dobie of Chester claimed that ‘amongst my own patients I have witnessed very remarkable curative effects from their use’.⁷⁵ In north Wales, the landscape was both ancient and modern, where rural, mountainous landscapes met large-scale industry and infrastructure, and where the tourist could benefit from the restorative power of the west.

Degeneration at the *fin-de-siècle*

The restorative power of the west is explored throughout this book. Chapters 2 and 3 examined how moving westwards was a wellspring of spiritual nourishment, and stories of sunken lands and elusive islands re-enchanted the world-weary. Chapters 4 and 6 focus on the historical west, where the layers of the past and the historical imagination anchored travellers and their readers in a rapidly changing present. This chapter considers how the notion of an ‘under-developed’ west also came to signify physical and moral superiority for travellers looking back at the degenerating and enervating effects of urban-industrial modernity. Far from the language of deficiency and improvement, their descriptions of the west took the form of thinly veiled or explicit expressions of concern about the physical health and morality of the population living in large towns and cities.⁷⁶ The restorative power of the west, then, was a potential source of national revivification.

Arnold Toynbee’s lectures (1884) signalled a new consciousness of the changes brought about by what he called the Industrial Revolution. Alongside prosperity and innovation there were ‘evils’, including ‘disastrous’ changes in the living and working conditions of labourers that seemed to ‘exhaust’ the worker ‘and dull his intelligence’.⁷⁷ Toynbee remained optimistic for the future, but his recognition of the evils associated with urban-industrial modernity became part of a broader set of anxieties about degeneration at the *fin-de-siècle*. Max Nordau articulated the gloomy mood of ‘imminent perdition and extinction’ and its aetiology in *Degeneration* (1892), which was translated into English in 1895. Nordau explained:

The inhabitant of a large town, even the richest, who is surrounded by the greatest luxury, is continually exposed to unfavourable influences which diminish his vital powers far more than what is inevitable. He breathes an atmosphere charged with organic detritus; he eats stale, contaminated, adulterated food; he feels himself in a state of constant nervous excitement ... ⁷⁸

In the half century since 1840, Nordau claimed, the 'little shocks' of railway travel, 'perpetual noises' in large towns, the growth of newspapers, and increased communications via postal services produced a constant state of 'suspense' and 'expectation' that 'cost our brains wear and tear'.⁷⁹ In short, the 'vertigo and whirl of our frenzied life' caused a state of permanent 'fatigue and exhaustion' and physical and moral degeneration.⁸⁰ Drawing on the work of French psychiatrist Bénédict Morel and Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, Nordau described the various physical stigmata of degeneration including asymmetry in the face and cranium, stunted growth, large ears, 'squint-eyes, hare-lips', irregularity in the teeth and 'webbed or supernumerary fingers'.⁸¹ For Lombroso, the physical symptoms made it possible to identify what he called 'born criminals', and Nordau summarised the range of corresponding psychological symptoms, which might include stunted mental faculties, a lack of morality, 'unbounded egoism', impulsiveness, emotionalism, pessimism and a general 'mental weakness' and lack of willpower or capability to act.⁸² Crucially, Morel emphasised that degenerative adaptations were 'transmissible' so that the stunted mental progress of an individual 'finds itself menaced also in his descendants'.⁸³

In late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, degeneration threatened to usher in a period of national and imperial decline, and, as they made up the pool of potential recruits for the armed forces, the fitness of the male population came under special scrutiny. Public concerns about the fitness of army volunteers were especially widespread around the time of the second Anglo-South African War (1899–1902), though within the armed forces these anxieties can be traced back to the Crimean War (1853–6).⁸⁴ In 1888, *The Lancet* asked: 'Are We Degenerating Physically?' and described the degeneration taking place 'among town-bred populations', pointing to 'unwholesome occupations', 'improper food', 'over-pressure in education' and 'abuse of alcohol and tobacco', which led to various 'evils' including 'juvenile vice', 'sexual indulgence in early life' and 'increased tension'.⁸⁵ But there was hope. In accordance with Lamarckism, it was not just decay and decline that were transmissible but renewal and revitalisation, too. Instead of perceiving the problem of degeneration as one of fixed biological inheritance, the evidence collected by the Interdepartmental

Committee on Physical Deterioration (1904), the Royal Commission on Poor Laws (1905–9), and the National Birth-Rate Commission (1912–16) suggested that decline was caused by bad environmental conditions. It followed, then, that if stunted physical and mental development were acquired traits transmissible to future generations, then beneficial adaptations worked in the same way, and sensible social policy had the potential to change the conditions of the environment, and therefore the health of future generations, for the better.⁸⁶

In this context, it was believed that the west, made up of apparently unchanged landscapes, economies and communities, as well as racial types and characters, could reinvigorate the weary and degenerating centre.⁸⁷ Echoing the language of Nordau, the Cornish novelist Joseph Hocking arrived in western Cornwall ‘with my nerves raw and shattered’ but left ‘strong and vigorous’ and refreshed by ‘the Spirit of the West’.⁸⁸ Travel writers and guidebooks drew attention to the stature of people in western regions, too, emphasising their physical fitness. Ferguson described the people of Skye as ‘a strong, healthy, hardy-looking race’, and *Black’s Ireland* (1906) made similar observations about the people along the Galway-Mayo border in Joyce Country, who ‘have the reputation of being the tallest and strongest race in Ireland’.⁸⁹ Baring-Gould made similar claims about the Cornish in the *Cambridge County Geographies* series (1910), in which he described a ‘broad-shouldered race, above average in stature’ who, when organised into regiments and drawn up on parade, could ‘cover a greater space of ground than would those of other counties’.⁹⁰

The connection between physical stature and military prowess also pre-occupied the engineer and science-fiction writer John Munro in *The Story of the British Race* (1899). Munro cited the data collected by the Anthropometric Committee indicating that the tallest people in the United Kingdom were the Scottish, followed by the Irish in second place, and the Scottish were also the heaviest sample group in the dataset. When combined with ‘the military qualities of the Irish, not to speak of the Highlanders’, Munro was alarmed at the high levels of Irish emigration taking place, which he deemed a ‘suicidal policy’. In a passage characteristic of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism, Munro was concerned that the ‘British race’ owed its ‘success in war’ and ‘superiority of stature’ to the Irish and the Scots, and emigration therefore caused a ‘weakening of the nation’, sapping ‘its healthy blood’ and transferring ‘its best physique to other nations, who might become our enemies some day’.⁹¹

As well as the physical contrast, a moral contrast was drawn between the people in the rural west and the inhabitants of large towns and cities. In Cornwall, Dinah Craik claimed she had never seen ‘such an honest, independent, respectable race as the working people on this coast’, and

Baring-Gould praised Welsh labourers and small farmers for choosing to gather in their thousands 'to hear music and poetry' instead of attending 'races and football matches' or engaging in 'horse-play' and 'the vulgarities and riot of a collection of Anglo-Saxons out for a junketing'.⁹² In Ireland, the remoteness of the Aran Islanders was associated with 'high moral character',⁹³ and Frederick Verney's report on Connemara devoted a section to the 'Health and Morality of the People' in which he noted that 'there is little or no drunkenness', 'no thieving', while 'unchastity among the women is a thing almost unheard of', and 'honesty in this sense is almost universal'. For example, Verney went on, when the district doctor lost his purse containing £7 in gold it was returned the next day, 'and the finder could hardly be induced to take any reward'. Verney concluded that crime, if it did occur, was due to poverty, in contrast to England where 'crime is closely connected with vice'.⁹⁴ The situation was no different in Skye, where Ferguson could not recall 'ever seeing a tipsy person' and rarely heard any coarse language, which formed 'a pleasant contrast' to the 'shocking scenes, and the outrageous and blasphemous swearing, often heard in some of the streets of our large cities'.⁹⁵

Havelock Ellis drew out the contrast between the morality of the west and the vices of the towns and cities on several occasions in his article 'The Men of Cornwall' (1897). Ellis explained that the 'volatility' of the Cornish 'rarely passes into the rowdiness and horseplay which are still so painfully common among the true-born English'. According to Ellis, Cornish 'lads' were not known to engage in 'creating the maximum of noisy mischief', and if you were in the West End of London, and were awoken 'in the early hours of Sunday morning by ugly voices howling discordantly the noisiest music-hall song to the cackling accompaniment of reckless laughter', you could be 'fairly' certain that 'these people were not born in Cornwall'. Likewise, Cornish wrestling was 'graceful and vigorous', and 'there is nothing of the reckless barbarity of football so dear to the hearts of the northern English countrymen'.⁹⁶ The depiction of the west in this way was a noticeable trend in English culture, which continued to value the periphery as a site of renewal and revitalisation, finding the spirit, as Robert Colls put it, 'richer for a little neck-stretching towards the Scottish Border, the Irish Sea, or the Welsh Marches'.⁹⁷

Escaping mass society

The anxieties about degeneration at the *fin-de-siècle* were connected to the fear of the crowd, in which, it was thought, people regressed into primitive disorder. Fear of the crowd intensified in a society which, through

electoral reform in 1867, 1884 and 1885, was approaching mass democracy.⁹⁸ At the same time, Education Acts in 1880, 1893 and 1899 introduced universal elementary education and brought into being a mass literate public.⁹⁹ To capture the new reading public, ‘circulation-getter’ newspapers worked on commercial principles and shifted print media away from the detailed coverage of parliamentary debates, diplomatic and imperial events, and financial news that characterised the Victorian national morning press. Instead, the popular press expanded its coverage of sport, cinema and fashion.¹⁰⁰ In the interwar period, the commercialisation of culture intensified in response to falling living costs and working hours, which increased spending power and carved out more time for people to visit the cinema or nightclub, listen to jazz in the dancehall or on the radio, and take a paid holiday to a seaside resort, which was an entitlement enjoyed by four million British employees by 1937.¹⁰¹ In response, intellectuals across Europe were hostile towards the new mass culture, which was considered vulgar, trivial, and represented cultural regression.¹⁰²

These transformations in politics and culture were accompanied by an expansion of lower middle-class employment in commerce, insurance, banks and property. The clerk became a figure of ridicule, living a comfortable but dull, domesticated life in the suburbs while working in a repetitive, meaningless and sedentary job.¹⁰³ In *The Condition of England* (1909), C. F. G. Masterman unleashed an overblown tirade on this new class of people, who he named ‘the Suburbans’. Like many social commentators in the early decades of the twentieth century, Masterman sneered at the ‘homogenous’ life of ‘sedentary occupation’, ‘security’, and ‘respectability’ lived by the suburban man, who was ‘sucked into the City at daybreak’, spent long hours in ‘small, crowded offices, under artificial light’, while the suburban woman engaged in ‘pious sociabilities’ and visited shopping centres. In August, a short break from this ‘stifling’ routine took the suburban couple to ‘the more genteel of the southern watering-places’, where they put up with ‘cramped lodging and extortionate prices’.¹⁰⁴ Fashion, deportment and bickering about garden fences were more important than social service, ‘public duty’ and ‘great causes’ to the suburbans, and their chosen newspapers revealed a ‘cultural debasement’ and ‘frivolity’ characterised by sport, gambling, sensational divorce cases, the music hall and missing word competitions. In such a life of ‘artificial city civilisation’, Masterman concluded, lay ‘the seeds of futility and decay’.¹⁰⁵

This shift in language was reflected in guidebooks and travel writing, which increasingly presented the west as an escape from the city, the suburb, modern work, mass culture and commercialism. For Alexander Smith, Skye was an ideal destination for people who were ‘tired and jaded’ in both ‘body and soul’, ‘fagged with work’ and ‘haunted with visions of

vacation',¹⁰⁶ and MacCulloch also thought the island an especially attractive prospect for those 'weary of the many unnatural ways of modern life'.¹⁰⁷ This was an escape from what the Scottish poet and politician Hugh MacDiarmid called 'megalopolitan madness' and literary critic Rolfe Arnold Scott-James called 'the artifice of civilisation'.¹⁰⁸ MacBrayne's steamer guidebook for 1938 advertised the Hebrides as an antidote to 'the harassments of the hour and dull routine of the day', and, in the *Blue Guide: Wales* (1922), H. J. Fleure wrote that the upland north offered refreshment away from 'the jaded and overstrained business life of ... modern England'.¹⁰⁹ Masterman's fixation with the clerk was anticipated by W. F. Wakeman when he wrote that Ireland's 'magic, loveliness, and grandeur' could 'transfer the veriest attorney's clerk into a poet',¹¹⁰ and, in a printed collection of BBC radio talks about 'The West in English History', the historian A. L. Rowse brought together many of the themes explored in this chapter when he explained that the public were interested in places such as Cornwall because they stood for 'character', 'idiosyncrasy' and 'diversity' in an age when popular culture was characterised by 'the shamelessness, the vulgar and cheap insipidity of a Hollywood civilisation', the 'spawning of suburbia and industrial slumdom' and the 'ruin of towns that had both integration and integrity'.¹¹¹

Much like the beaten track, though, escape was not always so easy in Cornwall. Modernity encroached upon the west as far as Land's End, where Arthur Symons attempted to leave behind 'the hotel, the tea-house, the picture post-cards, the brakes, and the motors', and in *West Country* (1938) C. Henry Warren bemoaned the '[v]ulgarity' that had 'infected' the otherwise quiet town of Truro.¹¹² The answer was perhaps to go even further, to the Scilly Isles, which the guidebooks contrasted to the 'stereotyped holiday resorts' and where, an article in the *Manchester Evening News* noted, there were 'unspoiled charms', 'no cinemas', 'only about three motor-cars' and not even a telephone until January 1938.¹¹³

Lamenting the encroachment of mass modernity in the west became a common feature of interwar writing about Cornwall, which suffered from what one newspaper's 'Nature Diary' described as the 'discomforts of modernity'. Some of these discomforts were easy to spot, such as crowds at Kynance Cove that were worthy of Trafalgar Square, the 'charabanc loads of tourists' that were dragged to the Logan Rock, and the 'unwieldy hotel', which 'ruins the atmosphere', caused a decline in wildlife, and robbed the region of 'its power to stir the depths of the human heart'.¹¹⁴ H. V. Morton reflected on the changes that had taken place in Cornwall in a passage on the demise of the packman, who trudged around the countryside offering 'vanity cloths and trifles from the distant town' to the locals in the days before the railway came. In Morton's day, however,

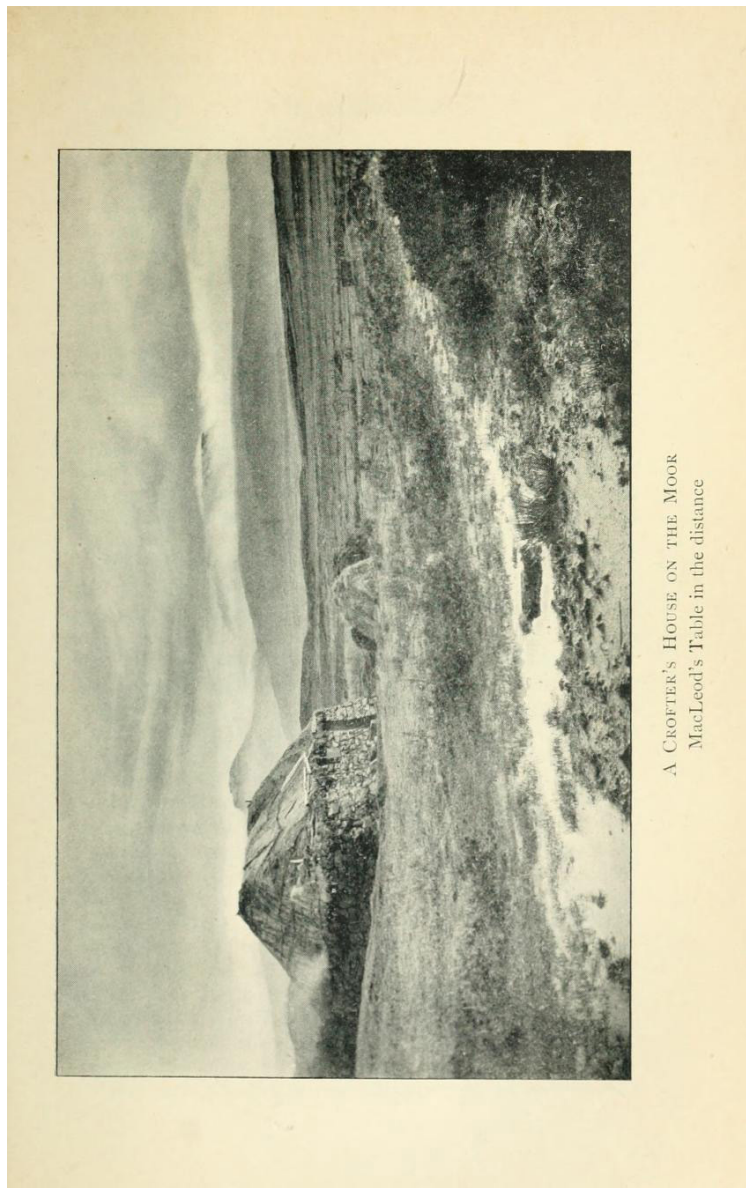
the locals travelled on the omnibuses to do their shopping, motorcars and charabancs sped along the roads, and ‘shops now canvass the wilderness with Ford vans’.¹¹⁵ Morton’s mind turned to another iconic symbol of mass modernity and clerk culture in the Claddagh, a small fishing village just outside the walls of Galway. He watched a woman returning from work, and on her head was ‘a big round wicker-work basket in which the Galway women sell fish’. Despite her traditional occupation, Morton thought ‘she was going home to put on stockings, high-heeled shoes, and a tight little black felt hat!’ and he thought it a shame that after ‘resisting the world for so long’ the Claddagh has ‘capitulated to Mr Selfridge’.¹¹⁶

Morton’s preoccupation with Mr Selfridge and Ford infiltrating the west was part of a broader anxiety about the emasculating consequences of modernity, which focused on consumerism, the growing recruitment of women as clerks and the domesticating atmosphere of suburbia.¹¹⁷ D. H. Lawrence referred to suburban houses as ‘horrid little mantraps’, and in George Orwell’s *Coming Up For Air* (1939) the salesman George Bowling feels trapped by his family, employment and prison-like suburban surroundings.¹¹⁸ In response, many writers, including Lawrence, Waugh, Greene, Eliot and Auden, sought inspiration abroad.¹¹⁹ Nicola Bishop and Melanie Tebbutt have shown, however, that English landscapes also offered the male middle-class clerk the chance to reclaim his masculinity. In southern England, the rambling clerk ventured into a feminised landscape in the novels and travelogues of H. G. Wells, Jerome K. Jerome, E. M. Forster, J. B. Priestley and others, while the more challenging upland moorlands of Derbyshire required ‘stoicism, hardiness and endurance’ from ramblers who went out to realise their manliness.¹²⁰ As [Chapter 4](#) demonstrated, the mountains and cliffs of the west offered a more extreme challenge still, where potential danger and misadventure was present in every loose tuft of grass, descending mist and changing tide. While many women faced danger and found adventure, too, the significance of western landscapes as spaces of masculine self-fashioning can be understood as an extension and an intensification of the clerk’s rambles around southern England and upland Derbyshire.

The rapid pace of suburbanisation also became symbolic of the disorientation, continuous change and sense of dislocation from the past associated with modernity. From the mid-nineteenth century, centuries-old farms, fields and woods were lost to the spread of housing, which also spoiled the older leafy middle-class suburbs with cars, litter and advertisements.¹²¹ This is another transformation that accelerated in the early twentieth century. After the Housing and Town Planning Acts of 1909 and 1919, local authorities built ‘Homes for Heroes’, replaced slums with

suburban estates, and the number of new houses rose from an annual average of 150,000 in the 1920s to over 300,000 in the following decade, reaching 350,000 in 1936 and eating up 60,000 acres of countryside per year.¹²² In his book *The Housing Problem in England* (1907), E. R. Dewsnap was amazed at the rapidity with which 'extensive suburbs are springing into existence', and in 1933 the philosopher and broadcaster C. E. M. Joad wrote that 'suburbs sprawl like a vast red rash over the fair face of the land', destroying the 'true country'.¹²³ By 1939 even the once quiet Llŷn Peninsula was, according to the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales, threatened by the spread of bungalows that had marred areas of the north coast.¹²⁴ Some legislative protection against suburban sprawl followed the Restriction of Ribbon Development Act (1935) and the Green Belt, London and Home Counties Act (1938), by which time the suburb came to represent placelessness.¹²⁵ In the west, travel writers drew attention to vernacular architecture, and their romanticised descriptions of thatched cottages and crofters' huts were often accompanied by anti-suburban rhetoric that criticised the ugly, vulgar, artificial and rootless suburbs that sprawled across the countryside surrounding the large towns and cities.

In western Ireland, the most prized and romanticised architectural form was the countryside cottage. With 'thick whitewashed walls' and 'honey-coloured thatch', as Floyd described it, the image of the countryside cottage in an otherwise empty rural landscape came to prominence in the decades after the Famine and remained an important nationalist emblem in the nascent Free State.¹²⁶ The key idea here, articulated by Floyd, was that the countryside cottage was 'entirely in harmony with its setting'.¹²⁷ This is an idea repeated in Skye, where the organic quality of the crofters' huts was, for MacCulloch, evident in their 'low, lichen-covered walls', and roofs 'thatched with the materials of the surrounding moor', which gave the impression that they 'have grown' out of the surrounding landscape (see [Figure 5.1](#)). MacCulloch suggested that the crofter's hut 'is a product of nature, not of art' as it 'rhymes with the sober landscape, and partakes of its shaggy wildness'.¹²⁸ The perception of vernacular architecture as natural and having grown out of the landscape, in contrast with the artificial suburb, shaped discussions of Cornish fishing cottages, too. In the seaside village of Bodinnick, near Fowey, Geraldine Mitton described how the village walls were 'lined with bladder seaweed', which 'hangs in black masses above the incoming water', while above it 'rise woods and trees, and ivy and ferns, and all the paraphernalia of a country lane'. The cottages, meanwhile, were 'covered with rose bushes', and 'candytuft and violets come out in their season to creep over the rough stone walls'. This was far from the isolated crofters'



A CROFTER'S HOUSE ON THE MOOR
MacLeod's Table in the distance

Figure 5.1 'A Crofter's House on the Moor. MacLeod's Table in the distance', in J. A. MacCulloch, *The Misty Isle of Skye* (Edinburgh, 1905), facing 154.

huts in the moorlands or seashores of Skye, which seemed to have emerged from the landscape of their own accord.¹²⁹ But Bodinnick, too, was organic, rooted in its place, and in an approving tone, Mitton declared that 'there is nothing conventional or suburban about Bodinnick'.¹³⁰

Whether in desolate moorland or seaside fishing villages, harmony with the surrounding landscape gave meaning to the buildings and imbued them with character befitting their setting. The rooted sense of place that writers and travellers valued in such buildings emanated from their longevity, and their connection with 'many generations' of the past. As MacCulloch wrote, to live in such buildings 'is to call up a hundred phantoms of the past, to touch bygone years, to listen unawares to Time's stolen flight'. Unlike the new, rootless suburban houses, 'no old house is ever without these sad memories and pallid gleams of past years'.¹³¹ In Skye, the 'larger houses' were also appreciated in this way, for their 'unadorned character', built 'for use not beauty'. For example, Dunvegan Castle 'has the same natural appearance' as the crofters' huts, forming 'no break in the landscape', resembling 'only a more shapely form of the rock on which it stands'. There were no 'bird-haunted lawns', no terraces or stairways, and instead 'grim keep and ancient tower and worn battlements join hand-in-hand with the brown moorland, the shaggy woodland, and the lapping waves'.¹³²

The development of the Irish tourism industry was considered a threat to the vernacular architecture enjoyed by tourists, writers and painters. As early as 1897 R. A. S. Macalister feared that imitating the 'rampant commercialism' of England would bring the 'boisterous cockney crowd' across the Irish Sea, and with them 'a stucco nightmare of lodging-house atrocities' that would replace picturesque cottages.¹³³ The Congested Districts Board also came under criticism for replacing thatch with corrugated iron, and when Morton visited the Claddagh he was disappointed to see that 'many of the lovely white houses have been pulled down' and replaced by 'the most hideous little modern houses I have seen – worse and more hateful to the eye even than the atrocious bungalows of Sussex'.¹³⁴ In Skye, too, Holmes recorded the changes taking place in the early twentieth-century crofting villages, where the traditional thatch was giving way to 'roofing of tarred cloth or corrugated iron' – a change 'not loved by an artist or a devotee of the picturesque'.¹³⁵

These were, of course, romanticised descriptions of dwellings that otherwise displayed the severe poverty of crofters and tenants. Other travellers instead described 'tumble-down, tenantless houses', and 'wretched dwellings', which drew attention to the plight of the poor, and of the evicted who crowded into hovels for shelter at night.¹³⁶ Some were

surprised to find that cottages with collapsed roofs were in fact occupied, and it was common for writers to remark that some cottages were ‘unfit for cattle at home’.¹³⁷ But they were writing against a widespread tendency to accept impoverished conditions as the natural abode of the peasants of the west. The author and photographer Mary Donaldson described the life of the crofter as ‘exactly suited to the Highland temperament’, and, for MacCulloch, the crofter was ‘a son of the soil’, who had ‘learned contentment apart from ease and luxury’ and whose lot was pleasant in comparison with ‘slum-dwellers in towns’.¹³⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, as well as journeying westwards, travellers also looked back towards home. Far from peripheral, the west was in fact central because it carved out a space for the articulation of a variety of responses to the transformations of industrial and urban modernity.¹³⁹ These responses were multiple and contradictory. Some areas of the west became the focus for discussions about economic development and the need for settlement, investment and improvement due to the deficiencies of the population, who failed to realise the potential of the land. At the same time, discussions of industry, degeneration, mass culture and suburbanisation in travel writing offer a valuable insight into the perceived problems of urban-industrial modernity, and how they changed over time. These passages of social commentary contained either thinly veiled or explicit criticisms of the physical health and morality in the towns and cities, as well as the spread of modern architecture which symbolised cultural decline. This chapter also suggests that western landscapes, while often understood in terms of difference, offered opportunities for masculine self-fashioning that share important connections with the rambling clerk in southern England and upland Derbyshire.

In the west, travellers’ perception of being remote from urban-industrial modernity gave them a sense of perspective when they looked back to the places they had left behind. Some of them found answers to the perceived problems of modernity in a collection of places that, it was believed, had remained largely isolated from the degenerative effects of modernity, preserving physical health, morality and culture that was reinforced by the rural environment. The final two chapters of this book explore how the geological, racial, linguistic, cultural and historical differences of the west were mobilised in an attempt to promote a version of Britishness that was multinational, pluralistic and had deep historical roots.

Notes

1. Rieger and Daunton, 'Introduction', 4; B. Short, D. Gilbert and D. Matless, 'Historical Geographies of British Modernity', in *Geographies of British Modernity: Space and Society in the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Gilbert, D. Matless and B. Short (Oxford, 2003), 1–27, at 2.
2. K. Hill, 'Narratives of Travel, Narratives That Travel', in *Britain and the Narration of Travel in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. K. Hill (London, 2016), 1–10. Also see T. Youngs, 'Where Are We Going? Cross-Border Approaches to Travel Writing', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. G. Hooper and T. Youngs (Aldershot, 2004), 167–80, at 174.
3. Rieger and Daunton, 'Introduction', 2–3; Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, 1.
4. Short, Gilbert and Matless, 'Historical Geographies of British Modernity', 2; Rieger and Daunton, 'Introduction', 2–3, 5–8; J. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London, 1992), 3–22; Berman, *Experience of Modernity*, 13–16.
5. Rieger and Daunton, 'Introduction', 2–3; Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, 3–22.
6. Berman, *Experience of Modernity*, 13. Short, Gilbert and Matless, 'Historical Geographies of British Modernity', 2–3; Rieger and Daunton, 'Introduction', 5–8; Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, 1; J. Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870–1914* (London, 1994), 32.
7. W. H. A. Williams, 'Into the West: Landscape and Imperial Imagination in Connemara, 1820–1870', *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 2, no. 1 (1998), 69–90.
8. London and North Western Railway, *Where to Spend the Holidays* (1906), 100.
9. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), introduction, 28.
10. *Black's Ireland* (1885), 220.
11. For examples, see Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), 229; De Bovet, *Tour in Ireland* (1891), 204; Johnson, *Isle of the Shamrock* (1901), 143–4. For similar comments about Sligo, see W. Bulfin, *Rambles in Éirinn* (Dublin, 1908 [1907]), 23–4.
12. For the crisis in western Ireland between 1879 and 1882, see G. Moran, 'Near Famine: The Crisis in the West of Ireland, 1879–82', *Irish Studies Review* 5, no. 18 (1997), 14–21.
13. F. Verney, *The People and the Country of West Galway and Connemara* (printed for private circulation, 1880), 3–4.
14. Stone, *Connemara* (1906), 133.
15. Hayes, 'Achill Island' (1894), 638.
16. *Black's Ireland* (1885), 9. For the Act, see Lang, *Black's Ireland* (1906), xviii. For the Department see Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), Introduction, 28.
17. For the aims and membership of the Board, see W. E. Curtis, *One Irish Summer* (New York, 1909), 460, 464; and Gwynn, *Holiday in Connemara* (1909), 5. For the prevalence of congested districts in Connemara, see Synge, *Connemara* (1911), 157.
18. Lang, *Black's Ireland* (1906), xxix. For road building, see C. S. Ward, ed., *Thorough Guide Series. Ireland (part II)*, 5th edn (London, 1906), xii.
19. 'New books, Stephen Gwynn, *Highways and Byways in Donegal and Antrim* (London, 1899)', *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 15, no. 9 (1899), 492–504, at 495.
20. Bayne, *On an Irish Jaunting Car* (1902), 94.

21. Synge, *Aran Islands* (1907), xi.
22. Murray's *Ireland* (1906), 247.
23. For Roundstone, see Midland Great Western Railway of Ireland, *Connemara* (c.1922), 10. For Streamstown, see Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), 259.
24. Quotation from Stevenson, *Charm of Ireland* (1914), 335–6. Also see Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 31.
25. For 'organised tenure' quotation, see Lang, *Black's Ireland* (1906), 231; Gwynn, *Connaught* (1912), 47. This system was also explained in Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), 260.
26. For Dooagh, and for plans that were not carried through, see Stone, *Connemara* (1906), 216, 336. For the kelp industry, see Synge, *Connemara* (1911), 189.
27. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), introduction, 28.
28. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 213–15, 220–21; This also occurred on Clare Island which was cleared by 'a thrifty landlord' to 'make room for cattle'; see H. S. Wilkinson, *The Eve of Home Rule: Impressions of Ireland in 1886*, 2nd edn (London, 1886), 41–2.
29. Ferguson, *Rambles in Skye* (1885), 124–7.
30. Ferguson, *Rambles in Skye* (1885), 8–9, 37–8.
31. Pennell and Pennell, *Journey to the Hebrides* (1889), v, xiii–xiv.
32. G. E. Mitton, *Black's Guide to Scotland, North* (London, 1920), 178. MacLeod's *Gloomy Memories* were originally published in *Edinburgh's Weekly Chronicle*, and the letters were reprinted in 1841, 1856, 1857, 1883 and 1892. In 1883, the letters were printed along with Alexander MacKenzie's account of the 'Social State of the Isle of Skye in 1882', in A. MacKenzie, *The History of the Highland Clearances* (Inverness, 1883).
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Part IV
IDENTITY

Chapter 6

Layers of Britishness

The final two chapters of this book argue that the west was at the centre of a bold attempt to construct a narrative of historical, political and multinational union in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This variety of Britishness transcended the different nations of these isles, emphasised multinational diversity within the political framework of the United Kingdom, and, despite lacking a more inclusive name, attempted to incorporate Ireland in its narrative scope at a time when the subject of Home Rule periodically dominated political debate. The pan-insular historical narratives of Britishness played out at three temporal scales, including geological processes measured by extensive periods of deep time, millennia of racial and linguistic developments indicating westward-moving waves of invasion and settlement, and centuries of historical conflict resulting in political union. [Chapter 4](#) discussed the traveller's historical imagination, which looked westwards for increasingly ancient traces of the past. The following two chapters explore how disciplines as varied as archaeology, geology, philology, geography and ethnology shared the understanding, encapsulated in the Irish word *siar*, that to turn westwards is also to look backwards in time or space.¹ Moreover, travel writing played an important role popularising this idea. History, it seemed, moved in a westward direction, from the European mainland in the east to the Atlantic shoreline in the west, and it was there, in the west, that the deepest foundations of the United Kingdom might be found.

This is an important insight because, while the role of western landscapes in constructing national, and often separatist, identities is well known, what is less well understood is how the same landscapes also upheld a broader sense of Britishness that claimed deep historical roots. The Britishness explored over the following two chapters was not

superimposed over internal ethno-national differences, and nor was it a homogenising blend.² Furthermore, it did not merely accommodate western landscapes but in fact drew strength from contemporaries' perceptions of their expressive difference. In particular, ancient layers of geology and the pre-Celtic Iberian race allowed for the celebration of difference in a way that provided unionists with a resounding means of defusing separatist nationalism, which was often framed in terms of geographical, racial, linguistic, cultural, Celtic and historical distinctiveness. At the same time, this also offered opportunities for the vigorous assertion of national identity within the union. The west was so important because it revealed the diverse layers that went into the making of the modern United Kingdom, which, it was claimed, was greater than the sum of its parts.

In [Chapter 6](#), the discussion is concerned with the deeper layers of geology and race. The chapter begins by discussing the geological imagination, which informed dramatic passages of description in travel writing and prompted discussions of important geological treatises.³ The chapter then explores how geological sequences ordered the layers of the landscape and spatialised historical time, providing a framework for understanding the geographical, racial, historical, linguistic and cultural layers of the British-Irish Isles, and for articulating the foundational place of the west within it.⁴ Third, this chapter examines passages in travel writing that discussed national development. Drawing on varied disciplines such as archaeology, anatomy, anthropology, history and philology, these passages shaped popular understandings of the composition of the nations in these isles. In the west, the 'Iberian' and 'Celtic' racial layers were deemed most expressive. Finally, travellers drew on a combination of racial and civilisational models of national development and applied the academic theories of ethnologists such as John Beddoe to the local populations of the periphery, finding specimens in the field and commenting on their physical traits and supposed racial makeup.

The geological imagination

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries an international community of scientific-minded researchers advanced a geological narrative for the deep history of the earth. James Hutton (1726–97), Sir William Hamilton (1730–1803), Horace Bénédict de Saussure (1740–99), Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), William Buckland (1784–1856), Charles Lyell (1797–1875), Louis Agassiz (1807–73) and many others contributed to a growing body of knowledge about geohistory, which uncovered the 'vastness of deep time' stretching far beyond the human past. Exact dates and timescales

had yet to be worked out, and there was ongoing debate about whether geological change took place in a uniform and gradual manner or catastrophically through tsunamis, comets, volcanoes and earthquakes. However, geologists held a growing sense of confidence in the reliability of their sequence of geohistorical eras that explained the contemporary state of the earth.⁵

In the 1830s and 1840s, a rough consensus emerged around the subject of the earth's more recent geological history. The existence of large erratic rocks and bedrock marked by gouges and scratches was explained by a synthesis of Agassiz's glacial theory with Lyell's drift theory. This was significant because the earth, once thought to be gradually cooling, was now understood to have passed through an ice age in its recent history, before warming up.⁶ The new geological knowledge was astonishing because it compelled people to contemplate the sheer vastness of deep time and to see seemingly fixed landscapes as dynamic, the result of rising, falling, folding, melting and eroding.⁷ The public was captivated by this new, exciting and terrifying vision of the earth. Agassiz wrote in a dramatic style about the extinction of species in response to drastic changes in the earth's temperature, and the reading public devoured Charles Lyell's three-volume *Principles of Geology* (1830–33), which was republished in eleven revised editions by 1872. There was no real distinction between scientific and imaginative literature. Travel writing drew on geological texts to add new layers of interest in their descriptions of the landscape, while geologists indulged their imaginative faculties as they worked backwards in time from contemporary gouged valleys and jagged mountains to prehistoric glaciers and volcanic eruptions. The combination of geological and literary imagination is unmistakable in the writings of Robert Hunt, a mine surveyor and antiquarian who wrote works of geology and folklore and in whose poem, 'Mount's Bay' (1829), the 'pensile rocks' and 'granite columns' are both 'old registers of Time' and the scene of druidic sacrifice, where virgin blood 'has deeply dyed / The pond'rous crags o'erhanging side'.⁸ John Ruskin combined his romantic sensibility with geology in *Of Mountain Beauty* (1856), and the clergyman and geologist W. S. Symonds wrote for amateur enthusiasts in his book *Record of the Rocks* (1872), while popular handbooks and lecture courses equipped tourists with the knowledge to read the geological landscape for themselves.⁹

Guidebooks responded to what *Murray's Handbook for Scotland* (1883) described as 'a growing tendency amongst tourists to combine the picturesque with the scientific' by providing lengthy geological sketches in their introductions.¹⁰ *Murray's Handbook for Ireland* (1878) admitted that the scenery of the country was 'too extensive and interesting' to be treated fully, and referred readers to a list of recommended texts which included

Edward Hull's *The Physical Geology and Geography of Ireland* (1878), John Tyndall's *Forms of Water* (1872) – an 'admirable popular treatise' on glaciers – along with Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and *Elements of Geology* (first published in 1838), which were deemed 'not too long or too much overloaded with details for the general reader'.¹¹

In addition to the informative introductory sketches, geology also inspired rich descriptive passages of writing, in which travellers imagined the dramatic, chaotic, violent and thrilling forces that had produced the valleys and mountains that lay before them. As he travelled through the glacial valley Nant Ffrancon, A. G. Bradley imagined the 'primeval convulsions' that had produced the mountains Tryfan and the Glyderau, which towered above him in a landscape of 'escarped cliffs and fragmentary boulders' comprising 'one vast chaotic upheaval of volcanic rocks'. These were 'fearful shapes', not static but instead testament to the 'pure ferocity' of geological forces, which had 'strewn' massive rocks in 'wild abandonment'. Looking up from Telford's road, Bradley was struck by the appearance of the overhanging mountains 'looking as if at any moment they might topple down and crush us'.¹² Bradley's image of strewn rocks is mirrored in Arthur Norway's description of Carn Brea in western Cornwall, which was 'covered with immense blocks of granite, piled in utter confusion'.¹³ Back in north Wales, Alfred T. Story looked up and contemplated 'the forces that have been at work through the ages scooping out the valves and hollows on either hand, and perching gigantic fragments on dizzy slopes, which one thinks a breath might topple down and bring crashing to the bottom'.¹⁴ In such passages, travel writers emulated the geological imagination of Romantic writers such as Percy Shelley, who marvelled at the 'ravaging' and 'slow but irresistible progress' of glaciers, 'performing a work of desolation in ages'.¹⁵

The convulsing, teetering and threatening landscapes described by Bradley, Norway and Story are typical of the way that the geological imagination became part of the travel writer's stock-in-trade. In 1889, T. Pilkington White was explicit about this when he informed the reader that his narrative was moving on from 'the poetic and picturesque' associations of Loch Coruisk to the geological history of the 'colossal rock-cauldron'. Like Bradley, White also read the landscape, building up a picture of a 'great glacier', itself part of 'the vast ice-sheet' that covered the mountains and filled the valleys 'in an archaic epoch'. The 'grooved and seamed and smoothened' surfaces were testament to the glacier's progress, 'footprints ... visible upon the naked rock'. However, in place of the immediacy of Bradley's account, White offered the reader a sense of the immensity of geological time. White's glacier 'ground its slow way down the basin to the sea', and the enormous 'poised' boulders were not

threatening but were instead gently laid down by the glacier ‘as it gradually shrank and dwindled away’.¹⁶ White then quoted a substantial passage from the second edition of Archibald Geikie’s *The Scenery of Scotland* (1887), in which the geologist acknowledged the ‘wonder and admiration’ inspired by the rocks, which ‘retain the impress’ of the ice ‘with a freshness and perfection truly astonishing’.¹⁷

The perilous and menacing geological landscape was not just a matter of fancy. A thorough understanding of rock types and formations was essential for climbers such as the Alpine Club members W. P. Haskett Smith and H. C. Hart, for whom the threat of dislodged stones was a reality. In their summary of the Mayo and Galway mountains, Smith and Hart warned readers about the ‘extremely treacherous’ combination of sandstone and decomposing conglomerates in the Mweelrea group, and the ‘loosely constructed’ gneissose of Binn Chuanna, which was ‘apt to disintegrate in unexpectedly massive segments’.¹⁸

The ‘geology craze’ was at its height in the mid- to late nineteenth century, but the subject remained popular in travel writing in the first half of the twentieth century, even if the lengthy Victorian introductions had been replaced by shorter geological sketches.¹⁹ In 1926, Bradley returned to Nant Ffrancon and again looked up at the ‘chaotic litter’ of boulders, ‘stratified rock’, and crags, in a landscape of ‘tortured surface’ that still threatened to collapse,²⁰ and in 1936 Hugh Quigley’s dramatic and imaginative description of the Cuillin echoed T. Pilkington White’s half a century earlier:

It requires little imagination to see the Cuillins in the ice-age, ice slipping down slowly from the peaks, leaving the crests vulnerable to the ravages of frost and whittling them down to skeleton form, while the corries were being hewn out by glaciers. These, with their cupped lochans and precipitous drop, are typical of ice-weathered formation ...²¹

In the landscapes of the west, wandering through the geological ‘archive of the feet’ brought the rocks to life.²² As Story put it, the ‘scientific details’ of geology might seem dry on the page, but once outdoors the traveller would find the ‘dry bones begin to stir and the whole subject glow and kindle with life’.²³

‘Built from a north-western foundation’

The geological imagination shaped the way travellers and readers looked at the landscape, and it provided thrilling material for writers who

connected contemporary landscapes with their violent geohistories of ice and fire. Structurally, however, geology shaped contemporary understandings of the history of the British-Irish Isles by providing a language of layers. In north Wales, Story explained that:

Only by following, as it were, with the mind's eye through successive operations of this kind – the gradual submergence of the land and then its re-emergence again and again repeated – can we comprehend, and then but dimly, the age-long process of building up the earth's crust as we now see it in this section of Wales, stratum after stratum, formation after formation, through a period of time in which a thousand years are truly but as a day.²⁴

The geological chronology of the earth was visible in the landscape, and this revealed regional variation in the age of the bedrock across Britain and Ireland. In southern and eastern regions more recent geological layers predominated, whereas in the north and west the rocks visible on the surface were much older. To travel westwards across England was therefore, according to Arthur Mee, to walk 'down the steps of Time, treading the rocks in the order in which they were made'.²⁵

In the west, travellers were aware that they were treading on ancient ground. In their guidebook for *North Wales* (1887) M. J. B. Baddeley and C. S. Ward explained that, if a 'continuous section of the country' could be obtained, the traveller would see how the geological formations succeeded one another 'from the newest to the most ancient, as we passed from east to west'.²⁶ More specifically, Story directed his readers to Anglesey, the area between Ynys Enlli and Nefyn, and the region between Bangor and Caernarfon, where they might study 'to perfection' the pre-Cambrian stratifications that comprise some of the oldest rocks in the British-Irish Isles.²⁷ Similarly, though the geology of Skye was varied, the traveller could find examples of ancient Archaean gneiss along the Sleat Peninsula.²⁸ Cornwall, too, came recommended in Ward Lock's guidebook for tourists interested in studying 'ancient formations', and despite providing just a 'very rough outline' Walter H. Tregellas at least felt sure he had conveyed the general idea that 'only the most ancient geological epochs, the *Palæozoic*, are represented' in Cornwall.²⁹ Descriptions of Cornwall's geology invariably drew the reader's attention to the granite which emerged from the Devonian rock in four large patches, creating a rugged landscape 'strewn with granite tors' at Bodmin Moor,³⁰ and cliffscapes of granite 'spires and pinnacles and minarets' at Treryn Dinas.³¹ In *The Sunny Side of Ireland* (1903), R. Lloyd Praeger described the transition from 'grey limestones with rich grass' in the east of County Galway to 'a wild region of ancient metamorphic rocks – schists, quartzites, gneisses, and granites'

that formed the 'wild moorlands' to the west.³² This, too, was an 'old pre-Cambrian continent' where Archaean gneiss could be found.³³

Moreover, the older geological layers visible in the north and west demonstrated that these regions were foundational in the development of the British-Irish Isles. In the chronological sequence of the landscape, each geological layer provided a foundation for the next, making an enduring contribution to the whole no matter how far from the visible surface it might be. Therefore, the Cambrian rocks of Wales did not merely mark out the country as geologically old. As the geologist Walter Keeping explained, the older beds in west Wales 'slope under those to the east', and 'it is the primal law of stratigraphical geology that the undermost strata are the oldest'. Therefore, the 'rocks of Cambria' are 'the foundation over which England has been built up'.³⁴ An article in *The Cornishman* made the same argument in 1905, and pointed out that it was due to the rocks of Cornwall, 'some of the oldest in the land', that eastern England 'has a basis at all'.³⁵ Likewise, in his introduction to Archibald Geikie's *Geological Structure of the North-West Highlands of Scotland* (1907), fellow geologist John Horne explained that the Lewisian gneiss formed 'the foundation stones' of the country.³⁶ Taking a broader view, Halford Mackinder declared that 'The British Isles have been built from a north-western foundation'.³⁷

This was a persuasive image that roughly corresponded to broad patterns in the age of the bedrock, but it was also a simplification, because areas of the west such as Skye also exhibited the most recent geological layers to be found in these isles. Furthermore, while the principle of superposition explained that older rocks were overlain by younger strata, the landscape also bore witness to processes such as deformation, erosion, intrusion and crossbedding, which disrupted the neat chronological sequences summarised in travel writing.³⁸

Nevertheless, geological stratigraphy provided a framework for the idea that the British-Irish Isles constituted a coherent geographical unit. In other words, the foundational layers of the United Kingdom were geological and geographical, and this provided a base of continuity that could be traced across the Atlantic seaboard, situating the west within a broader scheme of deep historical development. This is an idea that Halford Mackinder developed in his book *Britain and the British Seas* (1902). Along with many geographers and geologists of the period, Mackinder divided the British-Irish Isles into south-eastern lowland and north-western upland sections. The north-west upland section was characterised by moorlands, mountains, cliffs and wild seascapes punctured by jagged promontories and islands along the oceanic coastline, from Land's End and the Scilly Isles, round the Welsh and Irish peninsulas jutting out into the Atlantic, and north to the Hebrides and the Orkneys. Crucially, Ireland

was comfortably included in the north-western portion of Mackinder's 'British geography' because, he explained, 'Ireland everywhere consists of the detached ends of the features of Great Britain'.³⁹ For instance, the mountains of Donegal were of the same 'ancient schistose character' as the mountains of Islay and the Grampian Highlands, and 'we must', insisted Mackinder, think of the Welsh uplands and the Wicklow mountains 'as severed portions of a single mass'.⁴⁰ For these reasons, Mackinder argued that the seas which pass between the two islands 'are truly inland waters'. The Irish Sea, he continued, was 'wholly British, whose four sides are England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales'. In an evocative image, Mackinder placed the reader atop Snaefell, the highest point on the Isle of Man, where one could see a panorama of mountains from each country, which together formed the north-western upland portion of 'Britain'.⁴¹ At the same time, the Narrow Seas (Mackinder's term for the English Channel and North Sea) were by no means the 'inland waters' of a broader European landmass. Despite geological continuities and the historical movement of people, Mackinder did not let geology get in the way of contemporary political borders and made it clear that, in contrast to the Irish Sea, these bodies of water represented 'the strong natural frontier of Britain'.⁴²

The imaginative and dramatic passages contained in travel writing demonstrate the influence of academic geology, which shaped the way readers and travellers engaged with western landscapes. Furthermore, the naturalisation of history, and the understanding that the oldest geological layers were visible in the north and west while providing the foundation for subsequent layers in the south and east, were significant ideas because they demonstrated an enduring commonality that transcended the different nations of these isles. This was a powerful framework that provided space for the articulation of a particular vision of Britishness; one which claimed that the United Kingdom was not simply a constitutional arrangement based on relatively recent political acts of union but had instead emerged from deep time. Using this language, writers assembled sequenced narratives of history in which the west provided evidence of a particular contribution to the whole. This began with geology, but it was applied to race, language and culture, too.

Racial 'strata'

The development of geological knowledge has been understood as a process by which nature became historicised – the earth had a past; a history that could be studied and established.⁴³ Less attention has been

paid to the concurrent process by which perceptions of human history became heavily inflected by geology. In his book *Inscriptions of Nature* (2020), Pratik Chakrabarti used the term 'the naturalization of history' to describe how 'the deep time of rocks, landscapes, and rivers conferred new meanings upon historical antiquity'.⁴⁴ Chakrabarti is interested in nineteenth-century India, where 'geologists, archaeologists, Orientalists, engineers, and urban planners' came to think about Indian 'landscape, people, past, and destiny' in a way that was 'infused with the deep history of nature'.⁴⁵ The naturalisation of history took place in Britain and Ireland, too, and historians such as Chris Manias, literary scholars including Stefan Collini, and the archaeologist Timothy Champion have demonstrated how geology shaped interpretations of both the remote and more recent national past.⁴⁶ This is evident in William G. Hutchinson's 1896 translation of Ernest Renan's essay 'La Poésie des Races Celtiques' (1854), in which the language of geology permeates Renan's description of 'entering on the subterranean strata of another world' when passing from Normandy into Brittany. 'A like change is apparent, I am told', Renan continued, when passing from England into Wales, from Lowland into Highland Scotland, and entering certain districts in Ireland, where the traveller encountered differences of language, race and manners.⁴⁷ Similarly, in John Rhys and David Brynmor-Jones's *The Welsh People* (1900), the 'predominant element' in the population was described as 'the substratum contributed by the earliest lords of the soil of these islands'.⁴⁸

Geological terms came to be widely used in discussions of national development. In *The Races of Britain* (1885), John Beddoe suggested that, in the period when the Romans arrived on these shores, the population consisted of a 'foundation-layer' of 'dark races', on top of which lay 'subsequent deposits' of 'several' Celtic 'strata', the 'most recent layers' of which 'were Belgic'.⁴⁹ Arthur Salmon also used the popular geological metaphor to describe skull measurement as 'the bed-rock racial distinction'.⁵⁰ Similarly, in MacCulloch's *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), the historical layers of the island reached back from the recent 'romantic days of Prince Charlie' into 'the voiceless generations of those dim ages when the island was built up, stratum by stratum, out of the unknown deep'.⁵¹ MacCulloch also saw the folk customs of the islanders as indicative of a 'deep stratum of a belief in magic'.⁵² In Story's *North Wales* (1907), the language of strata and layers filtered into descriptions of the so-called 'Iberian' 'bed-rock race' which, it was thought, predominated in the west. In an appeal to his English readers, Story argued that his book was relevant to them 'because we get in Wales a more concentrated amalgam, as it were, of the racial influences that went into the making of England as a whole'.⁵³ It was not only Welsh

geology that provided the foundation of England; Welsh racial layers did so, too.

There were other influential strains of thought circulating alongside layered and mixed understandings of national development in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps most familiar is the strict concept of fixed racial essence famously expressed by Robert Knox in *The Races of Men* (1850). It is well established in the historiography that this strain of thought was mobilised by Teutonists to articulate what they saw as the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, but recent research has drawn more attention to the fact that Irish nationalists also adopted the same model of fixed racial categories to assert their own claims of Celtic supremacy and national distinctiveness.⁵⁴ As Bryan Ward-Perkins has shown, those wishing to construct a narrative of separate peoples and mutual hostility between the Celt and the Saxon had a lot of historical material with which to bolster their claims.⁵⁵ In contrast, Peter Mandler has emphasised the significance of a civilisational perspective in mid-Victorian Britain, which proposed a universal scheme of stadial development passing through savagery and barbarism to settled life or civilisation.⁵⁶ Furthermore, around the turn of the twentieth century geographers such as H. J. Fleure emphasised the environment as a necessary context for understanding national development.⁵⁷

These ideas were articulated in the vast academic and popular literatures of the period in hard and soft varieties, as well as in various combinations, and they drew on a wide range of academic disciplines. The language of race was also used in a variety of ways to describe nations, waves of migration, genealogies, linguistic categories, and as a generic term for any kind of group, as well as to denote groups that shared certain physical characteristics.⁵⁸ The subject of national development was, in short, complex, and contemporaries were aware of this. As Alexander MacBain wrote in his 'Excursus and Notes' to the second edition of W. F. Skene's *The Highlanders of Scotland* (1902), the question of 'the ethnology of the British Isles' was 'in an unsettled state' because 'the subject draws its materials from various subordinate or kindred sciences', including archaeology, anatomy, anthropology, history and philology.⁵⁹ MacBain's list of disciplines could pass for subheadings in the introductory section of a typical Victorian guidebook, and travel writing offers an opportunity to examine which ideas filtered into more widely read texts.

At first glance, many guidebooks seemed to endorse a model of distinct and geographically organised races. For instance, *Black's Scotland* (1887) neatly divided the country into three prevailing groups: 'the Saxon in the south; the Celtic in the Highlands; and the Scandinavian principally in the north-east, including Orkney and Shetland'.⁶⁰ At face value, this seems

to be compatible with the narrative of historical progress that described 'superior' peoples conquering and displacing 'inferior' ones. In the work of historians such as Theodor Mommsen, J. A. Froude, John Mitchell Kemble, J. R. Green and E. A. Freeman, it was argued that the 'language, customs, institutions and blood' of the modern English nation derived from Germanic migrants from the fifth century onwards. Furthermore, so the theory went, traces of this inheritance were observable in the contemporary populations of eastern England and southern Scotland.⁶¹

There certainly were writers who subscribed to such views. In his introduction to a 1906 edition of George Borrow's *Wild Wales*, the poet and literary critic Theodore Watts-Dunton applied the idea of Germanic expansion and replacement to the Welsh and English languages. After establishing his credentials as 'a true lover of Wales' and 'most things Cymric', Watts-Dunton declared 'it is not the excellence of a tongue which makes it survive and causes it to spread over the earth, but the energy, military or commercial, of the people who speak it'. This explained 'the vast expansion of the English language all over the world'. Combining his appreciation of Wales with an implied sense of the nation's inferiority, he suggested that 'if Welsh does not survive it will not be because it is not a fine language'.⁶² Michael Shoemaker took a similar approach to the Irish language, claiming that the spread of English was 'a case of survival of the fittest', and that attempts to revive 'the ancient Celtic' served no discernible good beyond being of interest to 'students and savants'.⁶³ Watts-Dunton and Shoemaker were drawing on ideas articulated in the philological work of Otto Jespersen, who in *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (1905) argued that Celtic languages played no role in the development of English, as there was, in Jespersen's words, 'nothing to induce the ruling classes to learn the language of the inferior natives'.⁶⁴

The civilisational perspective can also be seen filtering into popular texts that emphasised the importance of political institutions rather than an inherited identity based on racial characteristics. In *The Welsh People* (1900), John Rhŷs and David Brynmor-Jones acknowledged that, though racially 'Celtic', the Welsh 'have steadily progressed by the side of their conquerors in regard to all that goes to make up civilisation'.⁶⁵ Similarly, in 1911 the Scottish historian Robert S. Rait pointed to civilisation and language as markers of difference between the east and the Highlands in medieval Scotland, instead of the racial differences proposed by J. R. Green.⁶⁶

However, such views did not predominate in travel writing about western areas, and neat, simplified descriptions of geographically defined ethnic differences (seen in *Black's Scotland* (1887), above) was made necessary by the limited space available in guidebooks otherwise crammed with

practical information for the tourist. In line with the work of Chris Manias on William Boyd Dawkins, Colin Kidd on Scottish nationalist thought, and James Urry on Victorian ethnographic research, academic and popular writing about the west tended towards a historical narrative of racial layering, whereby historical progress was the product of the amalgamation of peoples.⁶⁷ As Havelock Ellis put it, it was for ‘the sake of convenience’ that he labelled the Cornish ‘Celts’. And, while he intended to continue using that label, he made sure this was with the reader’s understanding that ‘the Cornish are a race well compacted of various elements’.⁶⁸

The idea that racial groups tended to amalgamate was widespread. Despite the anti-British tone of his poetry and his connections with the Young Ireland movement, George Sigerson rejected the notion that there was a clear racial distinction between the English and the Irish, arguing in *Modern Ireland* (1868) that waves of migration had produced a thoroughly mixed nation of Milesian, Norse, Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, Cromwellian and Williamite. For Sigerson, the ‘union of races’ took place through intermarriage, alliances, invasion and assimilation, until the waves subsided and the races ‘mingled together more or less completely’. The idea of racial separation was, for Sigerson, thoroughly prehistoric, and peddled by the ‘Plesiosaurian’ at a time when Ireland was in desperate need of a ‘Statesman’. ‘The races of Ireland’, Sigerson concluded, ‘have always shown a strong tendency to amalgamate, and have in fact fused together’.⁶⁹ The educationalist Sophie Bryant put forward a similar model of racial mixture in *Celtic Ireland* (1889), in which she sought to chart the historical development of the ‘modern Irish nation’ by describing the ‘infusion of other races’ with the ‘ancient Irish’, who were themselves ‘a mixed race’.⁷⁰

Both Sigerson and Bryant were writing against the politicisation and racialisation of Irish history as a battle between Celt and Saxon, an idea that W. D. Babington took to task in his *Fallacies of Race Theories As Applied to National Characteristics* (1895). Babington took direct aim at Froude, Freeman and Mommsen for their insistence on racial stereotypes and national character, asking the reader where one should look for the representative English character – ‘in the Houses of Parliament or in our convict prisons, among the opulent or easy members of the middle classes or among the people described in Mr. Sims’s painful little book, “How the Poor Live”?’⁷¹ Babington emphasised environmental influences and saw the theory of distinct races and hereditary characteristics as ‘highly and mischievously misleading’,⁷² arguing that the Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain resulted not in replacement but in both groups remaining ‘as joint components of the nation’, adding that ‘such a mixture continues to exist, gradually blending and expanding’ after historical additions of

Scandinavian, French and other elements.⁷³ Babington's book was read by Rhys and Brynmor-Jones, who also pointed to 'intermixture', 'admixture' and the 'composite' makeup of the Welsh people.⁷⁴ Influence moved in the other direction, too, and philologists such as A. G. van Hamel, Wolfgang Keller and Walther Preusler looked at syntax rather than lexicon, which revealed similarities between English and Welsh not shared with other Germanic languages, suggesting 'Celtic contact effects' which contradicted Jespersen's orthodox view.⁷⁵ The archaeologist Walter Johnson put it succinctly when, in *Folk-Memory* (1908), he declared that 'the old teaching about the extermination of one race by another' had been replaced by an emphasis on 'continuity', which was 'the key which will open many secret chambers'.⁷⁶

Travellers and popular writers adopted the layered model of national development when narrating the *longue durée* settlement and movement of people across the British-Irish Isles. Building on the work of William Boyd Dawkins and John Lubbock, the British narrative typically began by describing how the Palaeolithic Ice Age race gave way to a 'dark' group variously called Iberian, Neolithic, Mediterranean, Ivernian or Silurian.⁷⁷ The Iberians were followed by Goidelic and Brythonic Celts, and subsequently by Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans. Ireland had its own, mythological, narrative of the earlier invasions, which described successive waves of Parthalons, Nemedians, Fomorians, Firbolg, Tuatha Dé Dannan and Milesians, before names familiar to British audiences entered the story as Vikings and Anglo-Normans.⁷⁸ The Irish mythological tradition has been described as a 'distinctive' historical narrative,⁷⁹ but it was in fact commonly understood that the Firbolg, Tuatha Dé Dannan and Milesians were alternative names for the Iberian and Celtic groups of people. According to Sabine Baring-Gould, for instance, the 'old Silurian inhabitants' of the Scilly Isles were the 'kindred' of the Firbolg in the Aran Islands,⁸⁰ and, like the Iberians, the Firbolg were typically described as 'a swarthy, dark-haired race'.⁸¹ In his racist and disparaging pair of articles 'Notes on Irish Ethnology' (1896), John M. Dickson used both 'Iberian' and 'Firbolg' to refer to the racial origin of most people in Ireland along with the populations of the western Highlands of Scotland and southern Wales.⁸²

The model of racial mixture and continuity put forward by academics was paraphrased in travel books, so that the *Little Guides: North Wales* (1907) argued that successive conquests of Iberians, Goidels and Brythons never resulted in a 'clean sweep made of the conquered people'. Marshalling the language of geology, the book explained that 'a large substratum' remained, 'to amalgamate with the new people'.⁸³ In a summary of the racial layers that made up contemporary Wales, T. Gwynn Jones noted layers of 'Iberians, Goidels, and Brythons', after which 'the Romans added

another element', and the Anglo-Saxons 'still further complicated the racial mixture'.⁸⁴ J. D. Mackie pointed out that the populations of Scotland and England contained the same racial layers of 'Anglo-Saxon stock', as well as 'a Norse strain, a Celtic strain', and an Iberian strain which was 'well-marked', meaning that the two countries were considered 'far more akin in race' than was recognised by the simple dichotomy of the 'Celtic' and the 'Teutonic'.⁸⁵ Mixture occurred at the local level, too, and MacCulloch explained that the 'alien race of Norsemen' formed colonies in Skye while 'the Celtic element was too strong to disappear'. The result was that 'the two commingled'.⁸⁶ Travel writers and guidebooks reflected the academic understanding of racial layering, offering a corrective to newspaper columns that simplified the picture to serve political arguments. As the geographer H. J. Fleure put it in his introductory chapter published in the *Blue Guides: Wales* (1922), 'journalists who speak of a Celtic "race" are very far out'.⁸⁷

Discussions of racial layering were influenced by folklore studies, which attempted to shed light on the murky prehistoric past. In an 1881 article for the *Cornhill Magazine*, the naturalist and Celtophile Grant Allen suggested that the elves, fairies and goblins in traditional tales were exaggerated representations of the Iberian race, and originated 'from the early days of the Celtic or Teutonic struggles with the small dark race which preceded them'.⁸⁸ Taking up Allen's idea, Arthur Salmon referred to Cornish pixies and knockers as the folk memory of 'a rather short race conquered and absorbed by the Celts', while the giants of Cornish tradition might represent 'a distorted and exaggerated recollection of an extinct race' of 'Palaeolithic men', who preceded the Iberian group.⁸⁹ According to Charles Batsford and Harry Fry, the mysterious Picts were one of several stocks that had 'contributed variously' to Scotland's 'evolution', who had left 'scanty clues' as to their appearance, which included ancient crosses and 'the memory of "pixies" in fairy tales and folklore'.⁹⁰

Archaeology also supported the notion of racial mixture and amalgamation. Much of the early scholarship equated archaeological cultures with racial groups,⁹¹ and in the late 1860s John Thurnam outlined a three-age model of the long-barrows and round-barrows, which concluded that the former were the older structures as they contained no metal, whereas the latter contained bronze tools and pottery of superior artistry. In line with the evidence of civilisational progress, the long narrow skulls of the long-barrows were associated with the late Stone Age whereas the brachycephalic skulls found in the round-barrows belonged to Bronze Age migrants and were probably Celtic.⁹² Guidebooks made the same distinction between the 'more ancient' long-barrows and the 'less remote' round-barrows with their 'bronze implements'.⁹³ Quoting the philologist

Edwin Norris, *Murray's Cornwall* (1879) described the 'pre-Celtic' race as 'the men of narrow skulls', while Sabine Baring-Gould explained that this 'dusky, short-statured race, with long heads' were present in both Ireland and Wales.⁹⁴ Significantly, there was also evidence of skulls that were neither long nor round but somewhere in between, which suggested that racial mixing had followed the arrival of the Bronze Age migrants.⁹⁵ The *Little Guides: North Wales* (1907) echoed Thurnam's views, commenting that 'the two types have been found in the same cromlech'. The 'neolithic peoples' and the 'Celts who largely displaced them' lived together 'and so became mixed in their tombs'.⁹⁶ As Thurnam himself wrote, rather than extermination, 'it is far more likely that they reduced them to slavery, or drove them, in part, into the interior and western parts of the island'.⁹⁷

'The great human drift'

The predominance of mixture and amalgamation in broad-sweep historical narratives of the British-Irish Isles did not, however, dispossess western landscapes of their imaginative power. The distinctiveness of the west was to be found in the greater concentration of the ubiquitous Iberian and Celtic racial layers. This idea was analogous to the geological picture, which described older layers of rock in the north and west that underlay the newer layers in the south and east. As travellers, archaeologists, ethnologists and their readers moved westwards, evidence of the earlier waves of Iberian and Celtic settlement increased, while evidence of Roman, Saxon, Norman and other subsequent waves decreased and perhaps even disappeared entirely. It is worth returning to Alfred Story's *North Wales* (1907) because he made the racial-geological analogy explicit. In Wales, he wrote, there existed 'a more concentrated amalgam, as it were, of the racial influences that went into the making of England as a whole', and the most expressive element was the Iberian 'bed-rock race'.⁹⁸

This went further than simply acknowledging that the west was geologically and racially older than other areas of the British-Irish Isles. Historical narratives of migration were dynamic, and described the movement of people from the European mainland in the east to the Atlantic shoreline in the west. This was often done using the metaphor of 'waves' rolling onto the shore,⁹⁹ and, like the waves of the retreating tide, the first Iberian and Celtic invaders from Continental Europe were understood to have covered the British-Irish Isles entirely and reached the western edges of the land, leaving a concentrated racial residue that was strongly expressed in contemporary populations. Subsequent migratory waves were increasingly shallow, leaving traces that were insignificant to the

point of being practically untraceable in the modern population. For writers such as Sophie Bryant, understanding the history of the ancient Irish meant contemplating 'all those communities that moved slowly or rapidly westwards to find new worlds'.¹⁰⁰

Sabine Baring-Gould specialised in reciting westward waves of migration in an evocative manner. After establishing that the 'Iberian' people 'migrated at some unknown period' into Britain and Ireland, Baring-Gould described the dramatic arrival of the Celts:

Then came rushing from the East great hordes of fair-haired, round-headed men, with blue eyes. Their original homes were perhaps the Alps, but more probably Siberia. This new race was the Celt. It was divided into two branches, the Goidels and the Brythons, and the Goidels came first.¹⁰¹

The narrative continued when the Jutes, Angles and Saxons 'rolled back the unfortunate Brittons westward' and into 'their last refuge' in the Welsh mountains.¹⁰² While acknowledging mixture and assimilation, Baring-Gould described centuries-long patterns of population movement with an immediacy that created the impression of a single group of people gradually retreating into the west. Elsewhere, Baring-Gould described the Scilly Isles and the Aran Islands as the 'last refuge' of retreating peoples,¹⁰³ and described the preponderance of 'dark men and women' near Land's End, in the Western Isles of Scotland, and in western Ireland as 'the last relics' of an 'infusion of blood' belonging to 'gentle, intelligent, artistic, unwarlike people' who were 'pressed into corners by more energetic, military, and aggressive races'.¹⁰⁴ Baring-Gould's exciting narrative style is typical of the genre, and Michael Floyd's description of the 'great stone forts' of Inis Mór was equally dramatic: they represented 'the last line of defence of the Bronze halberd-men' who were 'driven ever westward by the conquering sword-bearers of a new culture'.¹⁰⁵ In her account of a week on the Aran Islands the English antiquarian Mary Ellen Bagnall-Oakeley preferred Irish mythological terminology, and described how the Firbolg were 'attacked by a great army of the Tuatha Dé Dannan who were moving westward', and 'made their last stand' in great stone forts such as Dún Aonghasa.¹⁰⁶ The westward metanarrative found academic support in John Rhys, who held the view that the Goidelic wave of migration entered these isles on the east coast and progressed westwards into Ireland 'when the Brythons arrived and began to press the Goidels in the west'.¹⁰⁷

The westward-moving metanarrative was not without its caveats, though, and Rhys's view that the Goidelic Celts had passed through Britain and into Ireland before the arrival of the Brythonic Celts was contested. Evidence of Gaelic inscriptions found in western Wales confirmed that

Gaelic-speaking communities had settled in Wales, but for Sophie Bryant, Alexander MacBain and the philologist Kuno Meyer, their arrival in Wales came much later and from the west. In their view the Gaels, having arrived in Ireland by sea from Europe, began raiding and settling in Wales, and this process gathered pace from the third and fourth centuries. In Meyer's words, 'no Gael ever set his foot on British soil save from a vessel that had put out from Ireland'.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the geographer E. G. Bowen put forward a variation of the narrative that involved both eastward and westward patterns of migration. Bowen argued that Britain's south-eastern 'continental' culture had developed over millennia as a result of westward migrations from the European plains, including the 'western spread of the Saxons'. In the north and west, however, an 'oceanic culture' had developed through migrations from Iberia and Brittany, which entered these isles at the 'Atlantic Fringe' and made their way eastwards. Bowen suggested that the continental and oceanic cultures met at the geological and climatic border that ran 'roughly from Darlington to Dawlish'.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, the nuances and caveats often got lost in compelling passages of writing that simplified and summarised the bigger picture, and the broad thrust of the narrative remained westward. As Arthur Salmon put it in *Heart of the West* (1922), the matter was 'too complicated and too difficult to be treated fully', and readers were instead offered the striking image that the west was 'the last refuge of races that were pushed backward by advancing tides of population from Europe'.¹¹⁰ To imagine what Sophie Bryant called 'the great human drift' across the deep history of these isles was to turn westwards and gaze towards the Atlantic.¹¹¹

Finding specimens in the field

Beyond expansive narratives that described millennia of population movements, travellers were inspired by contemporary developments in ethnography to find specimens of supposed racial types 'in the field'. Travelling through the different parts of the United Kingdom prompted travellers and their readers to think about race in ways they otherwise might not. As a review of Mrs Stanley Gardiner's *We Two and Shamus* (1913) recognised, when the author and her husband were in Cambridge 'they never describe themselves as Saxons'. But when they were in Ireland 'they were at once terribly conscious of race'.¹¹² Some writers, such as the publisher and Welsh language advocate John E. Southall, were clear that discussions of race often referred to typical types in the abstract. Southall pointed out that, while it may be possible to discuss 'the blood of the average Englishman', it was doubtful that 'an individual specimen anywhere

exists'.¹¹³ Having established this caveat, Southall proceeded to quantify the racial layers of the English, assigning percentage scores to the composite layers of 'Saxon and Anglian' (45), 'Celtic' (30), 'Danish' (15), 'Dano-Norman' (5), and 'French, Jewish, Roman &c.' (5). When he turned his attention to the Welsh, Southall suggested average scores for layers of 'Celtic' (70), 'Saxon and Anglian' (15), 'Danish' (5), 'Norman and Roman' (5), and 'Flemish, &c.' (5).¹¹⁴ In contrast, travel writers composed passages of vivid description that discussed race not in an abstract form but instead applied it to the contemporary people of the west. In an entertaining passage, A. G. Bradley recalled an incident at a Welsh tarn when a 'sudden change from sunshine to mist and gloom' spooked his young gillie, who had been 'left so long to his imaginings'. As the ravens' croaks echoed among the high crags, Bradley connected the boy's supposed racial heritage with the stereotype of the imaginative and sensitive Celt, and wondered what the 'little Goidel or Iberian' had seen or heard. Given the tarn's significance as 'a very haunt of magic memories', Bradley suggested that the young boy may have perceived 'things not revealed to a Saesenog'.¹¹⁵

Other writers borrowed directly from physical anthropology, such as Baring-Gould's description of the 'well-developed skulls' of the 'ancient inhabitants' of Wales, who were followed by an invasion of people with 'round heads, bullet-shaped skulls, with beetling brows, and jaws that speak of brute force'.¹¹⁶ Writing in 1897, Havelock Ellis was more explicit about the research that shaped his description of the 'two aboriginal elements' that were observable as distinctive Cornish 'types' in the contemporary population. The first was 'a distinctly feminine type': 'slender, lithe' and short, 'without bony prominences' on the face, and the eyebrows 'finely pencilled'. The second was 'large and solid', characterised by prominent 'arches over the eyes', 'massive' jaws and a 'rugged prognathous character which seems to belong to a lower race'. These were the Iberian and Celtic types, respectively, which had combined to produce a third type that was 'large, dignified, handsome', with 'prominent noses and well-formed chins' and 'unaffected grace and refinement of manner', which set them apart from the Anglo-Saxon type.¹¹⁷ Ellis was influenced by the work of Scottish anthropologist and anatomist J. G. Garson, who applied the Cephalic Index to the contemporary population of Abyssinia in addition to the Iberian and Celtic races of Britain.¹¹⁸

Of course, most travellers stopped short of using the terminology of physical anthropologists. Rather than dolichocephalic and brachycephalic, it was more common for travellers to anecdotally comment on the 'dark' features of the people they met, such as Mourteen, the 'old dark man' encountered by J. M. Synge on the Aran Islands, or the 'dark-visaged,

elderly dame' spotted by Malcom Ferguson at a service in Dunvegan Free Church.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Madame de Bovet commented on a girl she spotted in the 'Highlands of Connemara', whose 'great dark eyes' looked out towards the sea, and Katherine Bates spotted a 'dark, thin, bright-eyed Cornish-woman' in a railway carriage.¹²⁰ As they travelled through Connemara, Somerville and Ross described the appearance of Widow Joyce, whose 'large brown eyes, and dark hair' marked her out as a 'specimen' of the 'Spanish type of beauty that is said to abound in Connemara'.¹²¹ Arthur Salmon explained that the 'small size, dark skin and dark hair' of the Iberian race had left 'traces, in speech and physiognomy, to this very day',¹²² and that these were observable in the west of Cornwall, where 'the dark of brunette type prevails and increases'.¹²³ The abundant allusions to dark features in travel writing demonstrates the popularisation of ideas put forward by John Beddoe, John Thurnam and other intellectuals who described the dark hair, eyes, and skin of the so-called Iberian racial layer.¹²⁴ Beddoe was a founding member of the Ethnological Society, and served as president of the Anthropological Institute between 1889 and 1891, and his influential book *The Races of Britain* (1885) popularised the method of connecting facial features and anthropometric measurements to racial origin. It was in *The Races of Britain* that Beddoe developed his 'Index of Nigrescence', which placed an individual on the scale by quantifying the amount of residual melanin in the skin, eyes and hair follicles. Additionally, attention was also paid to the jaw, brow and shape of the skull, which built on the earlier ideas of the anatomist Petrus Camper and the physiologist Johann Kaspar Lavater. The darkest and most prognathous individuals on the scale were described by Beddoe as 'Africanoid', which he claimed determined not just racial origin but also the location of the individual on the scale, in between the extremes of primitivism and civilisation.¹²⁵

In some cases, Beddoe's Index of Nigrescence could produce results that raised doubts about the connection between prehistoric racial groups and contemporary populations in certain areas of the west. In 1891, the English ethnographer A. C. Haddon and Irish anthropologist C. R. Browne produced an ethnography of the Aran Islands. Working as part of the recently established Anthropometric Laboratory at Trinity College, Dublin, and armed with instruments such as Garson's 'Traveller's Anthropometer', Flower's Craniometer, and a sliding rule originally used by Galton's Anthropometrical Laboratory, Haddon and Browne collected data on 436 Aran Islanders and placed them on Beddoe's Index of Nigrescence and the Cephalic Index.¹²⁶ Their methods were invasive, and they described the necessity of feeling their instruments 'actually pressing against the bony wall of the external auditory meatus' of their 'subjects', and although some of the islanders 'demurred at first' the authors claimed

that none ‘absolutely objected to having the plugs of the instrument inserted into their ear-holes’.¹²⁷ Having prodded, observed and measured their subjects, the results indicated that the ‘Aranites’ did not conform to the small and dark type characteristic of the Firbolgs or Iberians. This was in line with Beddoe’s own observations when he visited Inis Mór in 1861, and Beddoe also pointed to the English garrison left there by Cromwell, where the soldiers ‘subsequently apostatised to Catholicism, intermarried with the natives, and so vitiated the Firbolgian pedigree’.¹²⁸ Baring-Gould made similar comments about St Mary’s, the largest of the Scilly Isles, where the ‘Ivernians’ left few visible traces due to the invasions of Irish colonists and also to a Bedfordshire regiment that was stationed there during the Civil Wars.¹²⁹

Back in the Aran Islands, Haddon and Browne added to Beddoe’s Cromwellian example with the settling of the island in the Christian period by Clan Mac Teige O’Brien and then the O’Flaherties of Iar-Connaught, neither of whom were considered descendants of the Firbolg. When the many wrecks and occasional Galway immigrants were added to the growing ‘mixture of blood’, Haddon and Browne concluded: ‘To what race or races the Aranites belong, we do not pretend to say, but it is pretty evident that they cannot be Firbolgs, if the latter are correctly described as “small, dark-haired, and swarthy.”’¹³⁰ This view filtered into the guidebooks, and Beddoe’s line about the ‘vitiated ... Firbolgian pedigree’ was quoted in numerous editions of *Black’s Guide to Ireland*.¹³¹ However, the idea that the Aran Islanders were the descendants of ancient peoples persisted into the twentieth century, especially among Celticists. In 1964, John Messenger was writing against the strong influence of primitivist and nativist literary and documentary depictions of the islands when his genealogical research on Inis Meáin and Inis Oírr revealed that ‘all of the families in these communities trace descent from immigrants who arrived in Aran after the latter part of the 17th century’. The first census of 1821 showed ‘numerous’ English surnames on the islands, a result of ‘successive garrisons of Commonwealth, Royalist, and Williamite forces’ occupying Aran between 1652 and 1710.¹³²

When it came to spotting specimens in the field, though, most travellers did not feel they needed craniometers or the support of anthropometric institutions before declaring the racial makeup of the people they encountered. One of the most eclectic examples of the traveller’s characteristic confidence was expressed by *The Times* nature writer Anthony Collett in *The Changing Face of England* (1926). Collett, like many others, accepted a layered model of national development, and described England as a country of ‘many races’ that had experienced ‘centuries of migration and unification’, while also maintaining that those differences had not been

entirely erased and could be observed in the contemporary population. In Wales Collett spotted ‘a tweed-clad sheep-farmer’ who struck him as French-looking, and, placing the reader on a Cornish street where ‘Africa and Asia confront each other’, described types that included the ‘dervish-like chapelgoer’, the agricultural worker or shopkeeper who seemed ‘more like a Somali than an Englishman’, and the person whose ancestor ‘may have led a horde of the sons of Turan over the flats of the Dogger Bank on foot into England’.¹³³ These were ‘uncertain’ speculations, ‘not wholly baseless’, in Collett’s words, but also delivered with levity and with the intention of humour.¹³⁴ And, while some of Collett’s comparisons were eccentric, his method would have been familiar to many of the other travel writers discussed in this chapter. In Collett’s words, ‘it is not always necessary to measure skulls or make elaborate studies of the colour of hair or eyes to find strong traces of a Celtic population’ because ‘[a]s we travel westwards ... the change of speech is reflected in a change of face’.¹³⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the west played an important and underappreciated role in academic and popular understandings of the deep historical development of the British-Irish Isles. The geological imagination inspired dramatic passages of description in travel writing, and revealed that the deepest foundations of the United Kingdom could be found by looking to the west and walking ‘down the steps of Time’. Geology provided a stratigraphical model and a series of terms that were used to articulate the idea that these isles were also made up of racial layers, or ‘strata’, and the waves of historical migration – the ‘great human drift’ – also seemed to have moved in a broadly westward direction. It was along the Atlantic seaboard, then, that a greater concentration of the ubiquitous Iberian and Celtic racial layers were visible to the traveller, who brought abstract theories to life in vivid passages of writing about the contemporary populations of the west. The final chapter explores the political implications of the layered understanding of Britain and Ireland, which became more explicit from the 1880s as the Home Rule debates intensified.

Notes

1. Robinson, *Little Gaelic Kingdom*, 380.

2. For dual identities, see Colley, *Britons*. For blending, see Robbins, *Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 2.

3. P. Chakrabarti, *Inscriptions of Nature: Geology and the Naturalization of Antiquity* (Baltimore, MD, 2020).
4. C. Manias, 'Uncovering the Deepest Layers of the British Past, 1850–1914', in *Mysticism, Myth and Celtic Identity*, ed. M. Gibson, S. Trower and G. Tregigda (London, 2013), 49–59; C. Manias, "'Our Iberian Forefathers": The Deep Past and Racial Stratification of British Civilization, 1850–1914', *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 4 (2012), 910–35.
5. M. J. S. Rudwick, *Worlds before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (Chicago, 2008), 3–6; M. J. S. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago, 2014), 177–80. For the early influence of geology on literary culture in Scotland, see T. Furniss, *Discovering the Footsteps of Time: Geological Travel Writing about Scotland, 1700–1820* (Edinburgh, 2018).
6. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, 177–80.
7. Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 32–3, 43–4.
8. R. Hunt, *The Mount's Bay: A Descriptive Poem* (Penzance, 1829), 63. For further discussion, see S. Trower, 'Geological Folklore', in *Mysticism, Myth and Celtic Identity*, ed. M. Gibson, S. Trower, and G. Tregigda (London, 2013), 117–29, at 117–123.
9. Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 36–7, 48–9, 53–4, 125. W. S. Symonds, *Record of the Rocks; Or, Notes on the Geology, Natural History, and Antiquities of North and South Wales, Devon and Cornwall* (London, 1872), dedicated to Charles Lyell.
10. Murray's *Scotland* (1883), introduction, 23.
11. Murray's *Ireland* (1878), introduction, 14–15.
12. Bradley, *Highways and Byways in North Wales* (1898), 254–5. For other examples, see Baddeley and Ward, *Thorough North Wales I* (1889), x; and J. G. Shipman, *Holiday Letters of a Geologist* (Nottingham, 1887), 208.
13. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 318.
14. A. T. Story, *The Little Guides: North Wales* (London, 1907), 31–3.
15. Quoted in Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 121–4.
16. White, 'Camped Out' (1889), 217.
17. A. Geikie, *The Scenery of Scotland: Viewed in Connection with its Physical Geography*, 2nd edn (London, 1887 [1865]), 229–31; White, 'Camped Out' (1889), 217–18.
18. Smith and Hart, *Wales and Ireland* (1895), 156–67.
19. For examples of geological sketches in the early twentieth century, see R. Lloyd Praeger, 'Natural History of the South and West of Ireland', in *The Sunny Side of Ireland: How to See It by the Great Southern and Western Railway*, ed. J. O'Mahony and R. Lloyd Praeger, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1903), 260–77; Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), introduction, 14–17; Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 17–20; T. M. Finlay, 'Geology and Scenery', in *Complete Scotland*, ed. Mackie and Finlay (1933), 37–46.
20. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 178–9.
21. Quigley, *Highlands of Scotland* (1939), 68–9.
22. The 'archive of the feet' has entered general use, but originates with S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995), 24.
23. Quigley, *Highlands of Scotland* (1939), 22.
24. Story, *Little Guides: North Wales* (1907), 9–10.

25. A. Mee, *The King's England: Shropshire* (London, 1939), 2. For other examples, see M. J. B. Baddeley and C. S. Ward, *Thorough Guide Series. North Wales (Part II)*, 2nd edn (London, 1887), x; Howarth, *Scenic Heritage* (1937), 3.
26. *Thorough North Wales II* (1887), x.
27. Story, *Little Guides: North Wales* (1907), 10–11.
28. *Jenkinson's North Wales* (1878), lxviii. For the 'considerable variety' of Skye's geology, see A. Harker, *The West Highlands and the Hebrides: A Geologist's Guide for Amateurs* (Cambridge, 1941), 1–2, 75–94.
29. C. S. Ward and M. J. B. Baddeley, *South Devon and South Cornwall, with a Full Description of Dartmoor and the Isles of Scilly*, 9th edn (London, n.d. c.1900), 12–13; Tregellas, *Cornwall* (1878), 2–3.
30. A. L. Salmon, *The Little Guides: Cornwall* (London, 1905 [1903]), 5.
31. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 300.
32. Praeger, 'Natural History', (1903), 260–77.
33. G. A. J. Cole, 'Geology', in *Connaught*, ed. G. Fletcher (Cambridge, 1922), 41–59, at 42; Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 63; Mitton, *Black's Galway, Connemara* (1912), 209.
34. Keeping, 'Geology of Aberystwyth' (1878), 536–7. In modern geology this is the principle of superposition.
35. Ginever, "'One and All' Notes', 1905, 4.
36. J. Horne, 'Introductory', in *The Geological Structure of the North-West Highlands of Scotland*, ed. A. Geikie (Glasgow, 1907), 1–10, at 2.
37. H. J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (London, 1902), 357.
38. Some guidebooks acknowledged the complexity of the geological picture, including 'volcanic disturbance' that had interrupted neat chronological sequences of rock: Baddeley and Ward, *Thorough North Wales II* (1887), x.
39. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), 79.
40. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), 76, 78.
41. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), 20–21.
42. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), 16–17.
43. Rudwick, *Worlds before Adam*, 6.
44. Chakrabarti, *Inscriptions of Nature*, 5–6.
45. Chakrabarti, *Inscriptions of Nature*, 1–3.
46. Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 914; S. Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain* (Oxford, 1991), 97–8; T. Champion, 'Three Nations of One? Britain and the National Use of the Past', *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe*, ed. T. Champion and M. Díaz-Andreu (London, 1996), 119–45, at 119.
47. Renan, 'Poetry of the Celtic Races' (1896), 1–2.
48. J. Rhys and D. Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People: Chapters on Their Origin, History, Laws, Language, Literature and Characteristics* (London, 1900), 34–5.
49. J. Beddoe, *The Races of Britain: A Contribution to the Anthropology of Western Europe* (Bristol, 1885), 29.
50. A. L. Salmon, *The Heart of the West: A Book of the West Country from Bristol to Land's End* (London, 1922), 13.
51. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 19.

52. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 234.
53. Story, *Little Guides: North Wales* (1907), 61–3.
54. G. Beiner and O. Y. Steinberg, ‘Racializing Irish Historical Consciousness’, in *Race in Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. M. Sen and J. M. Weng (Cambridge, 2024), 42–58; L. P. Curtis, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (New York, 1968); H. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Montreal, 1982).
55. B. Ward-Perkins, ‘Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?’, *English Historical Review*, 115, no. 462 (2000), 513–33.
56. P. Mandler, ‘“Race” and “Nation” in Mid-Victorian Thought’, in *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750–1950*, ed. S. Collini, R. Whatmore, and B. Young (Cambridge, 2000), 224–44.
57. P. Gruffudd, ‘Back to the Land: Historiography, Rurality and the Nation in Interwar Wales’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 19, no. 1 (1994), 61–77, at 62; A. Rees, ‘Doing “Deep Big History”: Race, Landscape and the Humanity of H. J. Fleure (1877–1969)’, *History of the Human Sciences* 32, no. 1 (2019), 99–120; also see J. A. Campbell and D. N. Livingstone, ‘Neo-Lamarckism and the Development of Geography in the United States and Great Britain’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 8, no. 3 (1983), 267–94, at 283–4; E. G. Bowen and H. J. Fleure, ‘Denmark and Wales’, *Geography* 15, no. 6 (1930), 468–76, especially 468, 471–6.
58. The complexities and contradictions are discussed in Readman, *Storied Ground*, 141; P. Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 73; D. A. Lorimer, ‘Race, Science and Culture: Historical Continuities and Discontinuities, 1850–1914’, in *The Victorians and Race*, ed. S. West (Aldershot, 1996), 12–33, at 14, 16, 19.
59. A. MacBain, ‘Excursus and Notes, by the Editor’, in W. F. Skene, *The Highlanders of Scotland* (Stirling, 1902 [1837]), 381–422, at 381.
60. *Black’s Scotland* (1887), xiii.
61. Manias, ‘Layers of the British Past’, 49, 55–6. For a summary of race and Anglo-Saxonism in nineteenth-century intellectual thought, see MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History*, 89–103. Freeman was more overtly conscious of race than Green. For a comparison, see T. Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (Cambridge, 2011), 240–53.
62. T. Watts-Dunton, ‘Talk about “Wild Wales”’, in G. Borrow, *Wild Wales* (New York, 1906 [1862]), vii–xxiii, at x–xi. Hostility to European languages was a stereotype of the English tourist; see W. J. Farquharson, ‘The Coming of the British Tourist’, *The New Ireland Review* 5, no. 6 (1896), 339–43, at 340.
63. Shoemaker, *Wanderings in Ireland* (1908), 86.
64. O. Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (Leipzig, 1905), 39.
65. Rhys and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People* (1900), xxiii–xxiv.
66. R. S. Rait, *The Making of the Nations: Scotland* (London, 1911), vii.
67. Manias, ‘Our Iberian Forefathers’; Kidd, ‘Teutonist Ethnology’; J. Urry, *Before Social Anthropology: Essays on the History of British Anthropology* (Reading, 1993), see chapter ‘Englishmen, Celts and Iberians: The Ethnographic Survey of the United Kingdom, 1892–1899’.
68. Ellis, ‘Men of Cornwall’ (April 1897), 330. For an Irish example, see W. B. Macrone, *Through Connemara* (Galway, 1888), 1–2.

69. G. Sigerson, 'Pre-Historic Politicians on Ireland', in G. Sigerson, *Modern Ireland* (London, 1868), 378–87, quotations at 381, 385, 387. Also see 'Irish Republicanism', in Sigerson, *Modern Ireland* (1868), 11–19.
70. S. Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (London, 1889), ix, xiv.
71. W. B. Babington, *Fallacies of Race Theories as Applied to National Characteristics* (London, 1895), 3, 6, 192–3.
72. Babington, *Fallacies of Race Theories* (1895), 10–11.
73. Babington, *Fallacies of Race Theories* (1895), 233–5.
74. Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People* (1900), 13, 34–5.
75. M. Filppula, J. Klemola, and H. Paulasto, *English and Celtic in Contact* (London, 2008), 224–6.
76. W. Johnson, *Folk-Memory, or the Continuity of British Archaeology* (Oxford, 1908), 56.
77. Baring-Gould uses Silurian, in reference to the dark-featured Silures as described by Tacitus and not the Palaeozoic geological period. See S. Baring-Gould, *A Book of the West: Being an Introduction to Devon and Cornwall*, vol. 2, *Cornwall* (London, 1899), 331.
78. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 50–51.
79. Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 912.
80. Baring-Gould, *Book of the West*, vol. 2, *Cornwall* (1899), 331. Sophie Bryant was in the minority (and in line with an earlier generation of Celticists) when she suggested that the Firbolg were a Celtic race alongside the Tuatha Dé Dannan and the Milesians. See Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (1889), 17, 20–21.
81. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 50–51.
82. J. M. Dickson, 'Notes on Irish Ethnology', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 2, no. 3 (April 1896), 156–60; J. M. Dickson, 'Notes on Irish Ethnology. No. II', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 4, no. 1 (October 1897), 12–17.
83. Story, *Little Guides: North Wales* (1907), 62–3.
84. T. G. Jones, 'The History and Social System of Wales', in *The Blue Guides: Wales*, ed. F. Muirhead (London, 1922), xxvii–xxxiv, at xxvii.
85. J. D. Mackie, 'The History of Scotland', in *Complete Scotland*, ed. Mackie and Finlay (1933), 23–36, at 23.
86. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1927), 195.
87. Fleure, 'Land of Wales' (1922), xxvi.
88. G. Allen, 'Who Were the Fairies?', *Cornhill Magazine* 43 (March 1881), 335–48, at 348. Allen used the term 'Euskarian' instead of Iberian. Allen is also discussed in Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 932.
89. Salmon seemed particularly interested in the 'knockers', which were 'found in most mining districts' and were known to commit acts of mischief; see Salmon, *Cornwall* (1925), 42–3. For Baring-Gould's similar rationalisation, see S. Baring-Gould, *A Book of Folk-Lore* (London, 1913), especially chapter 9, 'Pixies and Brownies'.
90. Batsford and Fry, *Face of Scotland* (1934), 7.
91. For a summary of the development of archaeology as a discipline, from 'culture history' to 'post-processual' archaeology, see G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007), 25–7. For nineteenth-century archaeology, see S. Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic*

Imagination (New Haven, CT, 1994). For the Celt in archaeology, see T. Champion, 'The Celt in Archaeology', in *Celticism*, ed. T. Brown (Amsterdam, 1996), 61–78.

92. Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 921.

93. A. T. Story, *The Little Guides: North Wales*, 2nd edn (London, 1920 [1907]), 77–8.

94. Murray's *Cornwall* (1879), introduction, 43; Baring-Gould, *Book of North Wales* (1903), 1–3.

95. Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People* (1900), 1. This is discussed in Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 921.

96. Story, *Little Guides: North Wales* (1920), 77.

97. Quoted in Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 920–21.

98. Story, *Little Guides: North Wales* (1907), 61–3.

99. For example, see Sigerson, *Modern Ireland* (1868), 381.

100. Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (1889), xiv.

101. Baring-Gould, *Book of North Wales* (1903), 3.

102. Baring-Gould, *Book of North Wales* (1903), 5–6.

103. Baring-Gould, *Book of the West*, vol. 2, *Cornwall* (1899), 331.

104. S. Baring-Gould, *Book of the West*, vol. 1, *Devon*, pp. 2–3.

105. Floyd, *Face of Ireland* (1937), 6–7. The halberd is a Bronze Age weapon, made with a blade attached to a wooden or metal shaft.

106. M. E. Bagnall-Oakeley, 'A Week in the Aran Islands', in *Proceedings of the Clifton Antiquarian Club for 1893–96*, ed. A. E. Hudd, vol. 3 (Exeter, 1897), 99–107, at 103.

107. Rhŷs and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People* (1900), 11. Arthur Salmon repeated this in *Cornwall* (1925), 25.

108. Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (1889), 35–9; Kuno Meyer, quoted in MacBain, 'Excursus and Notes' (1903), 383.

109. E. G. Bowen, 'Early Christianity in the British Isles: A Study in Historical Geography', *Geography* 17, no. 4 (1932), 267–76, at 267–8, 272–3. H. J. Fleure also described the dual movement of 'agriculturalists westward' from central Europe, and 'coastwise movements around the Iberian peninsula and along the west of France', in 'The Welsh People', *Wales* 10 (1939), 265–9, at 265.

110. Salmon, *Heart of the West* (1922), 16.

111. Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (1889), xiv.

112. 'Mrs Stanley Gardiner, *We Two and Shamus* (London, 1913)', *The Athenaeum* 4470 (1913), 691.

113. J. E. Southall, *Wales and her Language* (London, 1892), 329.

114. Southall, *Wales and her Language* (1892), 329.

115. Bradley, *In Praise of North Wales* (1926), 96–7.

116. Baring-Gould, *Book of North Wales* (1903), 214–15.

117. Ellis, 'Men of Cornwall' (April 1897), 330–31.

118. J. G. Garson, 'On the Morphological Characters of the Abyssinians', in J. Theodore Bent, *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians: Being a Record of Travel and Research in Abyssinia in 1893* (London, 1896), 286–96; J. G. Garson, 'Remarks on Skulls Dredged from the Thames in the Neighbourhood of Kew', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 20 (1891), 20–5.

119. Synge, *Aran Islands* (1907), 3; Ferguson, *Rambles in Skye* (1885), 73.
120. De Bovet, *Tour in Ireland* (1891), 214; Bates, *Gretna Green to Land's End* (1908), 355.
121. Somerville and Ross, *Through Connemara* (1893), 94
122. Salmon, *Cornwall* (1925), 25.
123. Salmon, *Heart of the West* (1922), 13–14.
124. Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers'.
125. For the introduction to Beddoe's method, and the 'Index of Nigrescence', see Beddoe, *Races of Britain* (1885), 2–8. For other, concise, summaries of Beddoe's work, see L. Perry Curtis, Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot, 1971), 19–20; and Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch*, 192–3.
126. A. C. Haddon and C. R. Browne, 'The Ethnography of the Aran Islands, County Galway', read 12 December 1892, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1899–1901), vol. 2 (1891–93), 768–830, at 771–84.
127. Haddon and Browne, 'Ethnography of the Aran Islands' (1892), 777.
128. Beddoe, *Races of Britain* (1885), 267; also cited in Haddon and Browne, 'Ethnography of the Aran Islands' (1892), 780.
129. Baring-Gould, *Book of the West*, vol. 2, *Cornwall* (1899), 334–5.
130. Haddon and Browne, 'Ethnography of the Aran Islands' (1892), 826.
131. Lang, *Black's Ireland* (1906), 209–10. Mitton, *Black's Galway, Connemara* (1912), 210.
132. John Messenger, 'Literary vs Scientific Interpretations of Cultural Reality in the Aran Islands of Eire', *Ethnohistory* 11, no. 1 (1964), 41–55, at 48.
133. A. Collett, *The Changing Face of England* (London, 1926), 212–14.
134. Collett, *Changing Face of England* (1926), 213.
135. Collett, *Changing Face of England* (1926), 214.

Chapter 7

Varieties of Britishness

The final chapter develops a more focused analysis of how a layered understanding of the British-Irish Isles – and the importance of the west as the foundation – claimed centre stage in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about the political union. This chapter expands on the idea introduced at the beginning of [Chapter 6](#), that, while the importance of the west in constructing national and often separatist identities has long been recognised, the west was also placed at the heart of a multinational and deeply historical vision of the United Kingdom in the years before the Partition of Ireland.

The first section examines the strategies through which the geological, racial and linguistic differences of the west were situated within the political framework of the United Kingdom. This occurred in debates about Home Rule and in discussions of national character. Travel and travel writing were outlets for a relatively benign set of cultural strategies designed to forge a coherent, multinational and historical understanding of the United Kingdom, the tone of which ranged from celebration and inclusion to ‘sentimental condescension’ and ‘repressive tolerance’.¹ The differences observable in the west were celebrated as part of a unique contribution to a ‘British’ national character, which, it was argued, was essential to the emergence of a modern ‘British’ nation that included Ireland.² This is not to deny the importance of national identities in Cornwall, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Rather, it expands our understanding of the capacity of western landscapes to support a wider range of views about nation, identity and the union. Like W. B. Yeats’s poem ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ (1893), western landscapes could be read both ways.³ The west remained the place where the Irish, Scottish or Welsh nationalist could (and did) find

the heart of their nation, but, as this chapter demonstrates, it was also the place where varieties of Britishness were located.

The second section of the chapter moves the discussion on from the millennia of racial and linguistic developments to centuries of historical events. In travel literature, the history of the west was consistently related to events of 'national' significance, which refashioned western locales as microcosms of a larger historical narrative. These were teleological stories that attempted to describe years of war, resistance and struggle followed by mutually beneficial political union. Cornwall's past was written as a series of contributions to English and British history, and in the cases of Scotland and Wales, the bravery and loyalty that once fuelled political and military resistance were appropriated by the British nation, armed forces and Empire. The attempt to write Ireland's history was trickier, because narratives of unification inevitably slipped into more recent and unresolved political issues. Instead of describing conflict as a prologue to settled union, travel literature expressed hope that the Irish question might soon be resolved.

The attempt to include Ireland in a deeply historical understanding of the British-Irish Isles ultimately succumbed to the Irish War of Independence and the Partition of Ireland, and the Irish west became the exclusive cultural heartland of the Free State in the 1920s. This outcome has encouraged historians to view both the success of Scotland's and Wales's integration into the British state, and the partial failure of Ireland's, as somehow inevitable or predetermined.⁴ In contrast, by exploring the bold attempt to place the west at the centre of a historical narrative that transcended these isles, this chapter augments our understanding of its flexibility as a cultural imaginary.

Iberian Home Rule

The deep history of these isles, understood as an accretion of geological and racial layers, had important political implications in the 1880s, when the Home Rule debates intensified. As [Chapter 6](#) demonstrated, the westward-orientated narratives of historical development explained that older geological layers were visible in the west, which was also where the Iberian and Celtic racial layers could be observed in more concentrated form. This provided a motif with which travel writers and guidebooks piqued the historical interest of their readers and described the difference of the west that was one of degree and not one of kind. On the one hand, the framework of geological and racial layers popularised the idea that there were deep foundations and enduring commonalities that

transcended the different groups of people in these isles. At the same time, writers and travellers remained fascinated by the enduring expressive differences of the west, which were not so easily undermined. As contemporaries understood it, the expressive differences of the west revealed, in more concentrated form, the foundational layers that contributed to the makeup of the Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh nations and also to the United Kingdom as a whole. As such, it was possible for national identities to anchor themselves – as Gwyn Alf Williams writes of Welshness – ‘in variant forms of Britishness’, while a strain of Liberal unionism attempted to refashion Britishness in a way that accommodated multiple national identities.⁵

The political potential of subjects such as racial layering and mixed ethnology became evident in a series of responses to Gladstone’s First Home Rule Bill (1886). The Bill, long campaigned for by Parnell’s Irish Parliamentary Party, was defeated by an alliance of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, and the following year Liberal politicians clashed on the subject in a series of letters published in *The Times*. Sir John Lubbock, who opposed Home Rule and joined the Liberal Unionist Party in 1886, claimed in a letter published on 18 March 1887 that the adherents of Home Rule assumed there were four nationalities within the United Kingdom, and that these nationalities were differentiated by race. In refutation of this idea, Lubbock pointed to John Beddoe’s racial divisions of Britain and Ireland which, in place of neat racial boundaries coinciding with national borders, emphasised the differences between east and west ‘according to blood’. If nationality grew out of race, Lubbock explained, then instead of four nations there would be a ‘Saxon division’ comprising most of the eastern parts of England, Ireland and Scotland, and a so-called ‘Celtic division’ that might include Cornwall and Wales along with the western areas of Scotland and Ireland. In addition, a Scandinavian division would be represented by northern Scotland and ‘several maritime districts’ on the east coast and in Westmoreland, Cumberland and Pembroke, and, finally, south-west Ireland would be the district of the Iberian. Lubbock’s unusual new map of the United Kingdom was designed to disorientate the reader and undermine Home Rule by suggesting that any scheme of political devolution was fundamentally flawed. Even if one wished to make this thought experiment a political reality, Lubbock continued, determining the exact boundaries between the Saxon, Celtic, Scandinavian and Iberian divisions would produce ‘an endless number of bitter disputes’.⁶ If Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill was designed to resolve the conflict between Celt and Saxon, Lubbock’s letter suggested that it would have the opposite effect, ‘rousing race antagonisms’ that would be damaging to the United Kingdom and the Empire.⁷

Lubbock's impractical racial divisions successfully made the broader point that altering the constitution would be a complex exercise, but his argument relied on the premise that the Home Rulers did indeed equate race with nationality. A few days later James Bryce, who supported Gladstone through this period of Liberal division, wrote a letter of rebuttal arguing that 'a nationality may be made up of any number of races', and that 'race is only one of several elements which go to create a nationality'. Bryce accused Lubbock of 'confusing race with nationalities' and emphasised the power of history to fuse 'various races' and languages 'into a cohesive whole', naming Scotland, Switzerland, France and Germany as examples. The principle underlying Gladstone's Home Rule Bill was therefore perfectly reasonable: that in questions of national sentiment 'the opinion of each of the nationalities surviving in our islands is worth regarding'.⁸

Lubbock and Bryce were divided on the policy of Home Rule, and they disagreed over the details of Scotland's historical development as the sparring continued in subsequent exchanges, but they concurred that the United Kingdom's constituent nations were of mixed ethnology. Thomas Henry Huxley read the letters in *The Times* and, in a private letter, reminded Lubbock that he made a similar argument in his lecture 'Forefathers and Forerunners of the English People' (1870). Back then, Huxley's remark that Cornwall and Devon were as Celtic as Tipperary was, he said, 'hotly repudiated on both the English and the Irish sides', but the exchange of letters between Lubbock and Bryce was welcome evidence of the slow progress of scientific opinion and the 'exploded fallacies of Celt and Teuton' that 'did endless mischief a score of years ago'.⁹

Despite its apparent progress towards general acceptance, the concept of racial layering was far better suited to the unionist side of the debate. Beyond Lubbock's initial statement that racial and national divisions were not in alignment, the more powerful argument came later in the letter, when Lubbock quoted John Beddoe:

With respect to the distribution and commixture of race elements in the British Isles, we may safely assert that not one of them, whether Iberian, Gaelic, Cymric, Saxon, or Scandinavian, is peculiar to, or absent from, or everywhere predominant in any one of the three kingdoms.¹⁰

This was the ultimate unionist rejoinder to any argument in favour of Home Rule, or Pan-Celtic affinity in opposition to England, that mobilised the language of race. Lubbock put Beddoe's argument in his own words in the letter published on 25 March 1887 when he clarified that 'Celts, Anglo-Saxons, and Scandinavians people in no very different proportions, and with no fixed or clear boundaries, England and Scotland and Ireland

alike', and the following week the Liberal polymath George Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, wrote in support of Lubbock and against 'the barbarous work of Parnellite Liberals' when he declared that 'not only are we all equally mongrels, but we are the result of the intermixture of precisely the same breeds all over the United Kingdom'.¹¹

The Home Rule debates were not confined to Ireland, of course. The Scottish Liberal Association voted for Home Rule in 1888, and the issue gained momentum with the establishment of the Scottish Home Rule Association (1886) and the Young Scots (1900). In 1913, a Scottish Home Rule Bill passed to a second reading and drew public support from Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George.¹² In a speech in 1888, Thomas Edward Ellis, Liberal MP for Merioneth between 1886 and 1899, felt that Gladstone's recognition of 'nationality and autonomy' was widening the appeal of Liberalism 'not in Ireland alone, but in Wales and Scotland likewise'. Ellis acknowledged that nations were created by racial blending, and emphasised the contributions of 'Celtic elements' to the 'greatness' of Britain but nevertheless called for the creation of 'a national Welsh party' and suggested that without a national assembly Wales's 'position as a nation can not be assured'.¹³ An important milestone in the growth of Welsh nationalism was the establishment in 1886 of Cymru Fydd, a cultural and literary movement that, from 1890, turned its attention towards Welsh self-government. In 1895, the Cymru Fydd League (established in 1894) and the North Wales Liberal Federation joined forces, and a young David Lloyd George made the case for 'National Self-Government for Wales' (1895) in the pages of the movement's new magazine, *Young Wales*. However, aspirations for a unified nationalist political agenda were checked when the South Wales Liberals refused to join the alliance.¹⁴ The movement dissolved and with it any significant momentum for Welsh Home Rule, which remained a minority issue even after the establishment of Plaid Cymru in 1925.¹⁵

When, in the 1880s, the idea of Welsh Home Rule seemed to be gaining ground, the Liberal unionist William Boyd Dawkins marshalled the theory of racial layering in his defence of the political union. In a series of articles in *The Manchester Examiner* collected and published as *The Place of the Welsh in the History of Britain* (1889), Dawkins responded to the attempt 'to raise an antagonism between the races inhabiting the British Islands'. Dawkins rejected the notion that 'there is some essential difference between them which renders it necessary for them to live further apart from each other than they have done for centuries'.¹⁶ The Welsh were, wrote Dawkins, 'a mixed people' who, though they may be racially 'defined by the Iberian element in the mixture', are 'composed of the same ethnological elements' as the English, the only difference being 'the varying

proportions in which these elements are mingled in different places'.¹⁷ Dawkins cited the marked 'Welsh element' in the contemporary population of Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Dorset, Devon, 'and elsewhere', and concluded that 'the Welsh have contributed an important element to the ethnology of England'.¹⁸ In short, the attempt to 'stop or hinder' the political 'fusion of the English and Welsh' which has been 'to the mutual advantage of both' was 'futile' and 'mischievous', and the promotion of 'anti-English feeling in Wales' was 'unpatriotic', 'idle', and pursued 'for the sake of bolstering up the Gladstonian scheme of Home Rule in Ireland'.¹⁹

As Chris Manias has argued, the ubiquitous Iberian race was so important because it was understood to have made an enduring racial and civilisational contribution to the modern United Kingdom. This was ammunition for the likes of Dawkins because it undermined Celtic nationalism by demonstrating the 'much deeper basis of the common country'.²⁰ By articulating the distinctiveness of the west as a more concentrated expression of ubiquitous racial layers, it was possible for the western regions – so treasured by separatist nationalists – to become part of a diverse and pluralistic British nation. As John Munro put it in *The Story of the British Race* (1899), 'the four divisions of the United Kingdom are much more akin to each other than to any foreign nation whatsoever'.²¹ In a mischievous passage of his own, Dawkins politicised the long history of waves of migration and suggested that if any racial group 'deserve special consideration' it was the Iberians, the 'original possessors of the soil' who were repeatedly invaded 'by Celt, Englishman, Dane, Norman, and Fleming'. Dawkins went on:

If the Celt cry 'hands off' to the English, with still greater reason should the small dark inhabitants of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland cry 'hands off' to the Celt. This is the logical *reductio ad absurdum* of the doctrine that different races require different political treatment simply because they are different races.²²

Bringing his final article to a thunderous conclusion, Dawkins snapped that the Welsh 'do not want home rule', and 'if they ask for it, they will have to bring forward a better reason than that of race'.²³

British national character

The case against devolutionary and separatist nationalism took a more positive form, too. Working alongside rhetoric that sought to undermine and defuse, the argument was elsewhere reformulated in constructive terms, emphasising the contributions made by the so-called Celtic element

within the British nation and British national character. As Munro put it, 'The misnamed "Celts" are not the mere "fringe" of a Teutonic nation: they form, perhaps, the most important part of the British nation'.²⁴ As Munro's claim suggests, the positive case for a union of diversity recycled mid-Victorian ideas about the contrasting and complementary virtues of Celts and Saxons. If, in his letter to Lubbock in 1887, Huxley thought that popular discourse was progressing towards a more nuanced understanding of mixing as well as more careful and qualified statements about how, if at all, race shaped national character, it was also true, as Peter Mandler has put it, that this did nothing to stop those 'who wanted to believe in a racial basis for national character from continuing to believe in it'.²⁵

Around the turn of the twentieth century, books and articles outlining the Celtic contributions to British national character recited many of the qualities described by Ernest Renan (1854) and Matthew Arnold (1867). Renan's Celt was 'feeble in action' with no 'aptitude for political life', which was redeemed by an 'infinite delicacy of feeling' and '[i]maginative power' expressed in songs of 'delicious sadness'.²⁶ Arnold, influenced by Renan, also pointed to the 'delicacy' of the Celt, who was 'sentimental' and 'keenly sensitive to joy and sorrow', 'wistful regret', and 'penetrating melancholy'.²⁷ The notion of the artistic and imaginative Celt was reinforced by archaeologists who, from the 1860s and 1870s, developed a chronology for Iron Age material and attributed the fine La Tène metalwork to the Celts.²⁸

Arnold was particularly interested in the countervailing qualities of the Celtic and Germanic geniuses. On the other side, the Germanic genius was 'plain', well suited to industry and science, and otherwise defined by 'steadiness', 'honesty', and a 'lack of all beauty and distinction in form and feature'.²⁹ A revival of these stereotypes was boosted by the translation and publication of Renan's essay in 1896 and the publication of Matthew Arnold's treatise in numerous editions, alongside new works such as A. H. Keane's *Man Past and Present* (1899), which contrasted the 'mercurial', 'passionate', and 'impulsive' Celt with the 'stolid and solid' Saxon.³⁰

The concept of racial layering and intermixture was no barrier to the identification of distinct Celtic and Teutonic geniuses. In his book *Anglo-Saxon Britain* (1884), Grant Allen concluded that, in blood, the 'British people' consisted of 'a pretty equal admixture of Teutonic and Celtic elements', but this did not stop him from being able to differentiate between the 'unimaginative' Teuton characterised by 'sobriety, steadiness and persistence', 'scientific patience', and 'political moderation', and the 'wealth of fancy', 'intellectual quickness', and 'emotional nature of the Celt'.³¹ On the contrary, isolating each set of characteristics added weight to the conclusion that the special qualities of the British genius sprang from the interaction of the two. This was a case of combining the best of both, which

distinguished the British from both the 'volatile and unstable Gaul' in France and the 'less imaginative Teutons of Germany and Scandinavia'.³² The poet and journalist T. W. Rolleston – a member of the Irish Literary Society and the Gaelic League – made the same point in *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race* (1911), explaining that the 'blend of Germanic and Celtic elements' produced the uniqueness of the British, or 'Anglo-Celtic', people.³³

One of the supposed products of the composite British character was a distinctive literary brilliance. In the introduction to the anthology of Celtic literature *Lyra Celtica* (1896), William Sharp claimed that mixed Celtic and Saxon roots produced literary genius in Milton, Keats, Burns, Byron and Scott. But this kind of deduction could run in the opposite direction, too. Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, had no 'near paternal or maternal ancestor' of Celtic blood, but Sharp nevertheless claimed that the genius of his work was itself evidence of 'the Celtic strain in him'.³⁴ As Joep Leerssen has pointed out, this is indicative of how the terms 'Celtic' and 'Saxon' were more commonly used as handy labels for 'recognisable and even stereotyped national characterology' rather than as part of a taxonomy of 'inherited genotype and phenotype'.³⁵ For Havelock Ellis, every great poet from Chaucer to Shakespeare and beyond combined the 'Celtic spirit' with what he called the 'Nordic spirit'. Originally published in 1904, Ellis's study of the British genius was expanded with a chapter on 'The Celtic Spirit in Literature' in a revised edition (1927), in which the 'psychic qualities' of Celtic 'inventiveness' and Nordic realism had produced the 'supremacy of England in poetry'.³⁶

Not everyone was willing to accept the Celtic contribution, though. In *Celticism: A Myth* (first published in 1884), the lawyer and antiquarian James Cruikshank Roger disagreed with the notion that there ever existed an identifiable 'Celtic civilisation and Celtic art'.³⁷ Roger identified not with what he called 'the shiftless savage of the British Isles' but with 'that great Teutonic stock, which has ruled the world in the past, and will rule it to the end of time'.³⁸ As such, he expressed what the sociologist John Mackinnon Robertson called 'Celtophobia' in his book *The Saxon and the Celt: A Study in Sociology* (1897).³⁹ A more nuanced critique was raised by the historian William Lecky, who claimed that the differences between Celts and Teutons 'have been enormously exaggerated'. Lecky was also tentative about the idea of national character, arguing that the nature of any such differences was a matter 'far from settled', and pointed out that 'the qualities that are supposed to belong to each have very seldom the consistency that might be expected'.⁴⁰ Robertson also repudiated the idea of 'genius' whether Celtic or Saxon and disagreed with the 'habit of imputing specific and permanent characters to nations in the lump'.⁴¹ Edward

Thomas resented the romanticised use of the term 'Celt' by English 'decadents' who would drink crème de menthe and opal hush over stout or the Welsh mead metheglin, and preferred 'Kensington to Eryri and Connemara'.⁴² The subject of national character, though, was difficult to dismiss, and these dissenting voices remained caveats to the general weight of what Robertson called 'much cultured opinion', which indulged freely in the language of Celtic, Teutonic and British character.⁴³

For travellers in the west, discussions of the Celtic contribution to the British national character often focused on linguistics. The languages and accents heard in the west were consistently described as musical and deeply expressive in a way that reinforced popular understandings of the imaginative, melancholy and sensitive Celt. It was not by chance that, on crossing the Tamar and entering Cornwall, one of the first things Morton noted was a woman singing 'prettily', with 'a fine Celtic fluency' also characteristic, he noted, of the Welsh.⁴⁴ Linguistic differences had become easier to accommodate within the notion of a British character or genius since the publication of Johann Caspar Zeuss's *Grammatica Celtica* (1853), which confirmed beyond doubt the theory that Celtic languages, alongside the Germanic, were fellow branches of the Indo-European family of languages.⁴⁵

Furthermore, western landscapes became increasingly associated with the non-English languages of these isles, which were described metaphorically as having retreated into western Ireland, western Wales and the Scottish Highlands in the face of anglicisation. Infrastructure and tourism were widely recognised as principal causes. In Skye, MacCulloch's sense of 'some primitive foreign land' was strengthened by the 'flow of Gaelic' among the local inhabitants, but he admitted that the language was 'far more common before the advent of MacBrayne's steamers'.⁴⁶ Irish guidebooks invariably commented on the decline of the vernacular language, and official figures showed that the proportion of Irish speakers in Connacht fell from 50.8 per cent in 1851 to 39 per cent in 1871. This was, however, still well above the national averages of 23.2 per cent and 15.1 per cent, respectively, so that the Irish language became more closely associated with the west even within a national context of decline.⁴⁷ Even the Cornish language, which had not been widely used since the eighteenth century, was associated with Land's End where, wrote Arthur Salmon, it had 'lingered' longest.⁴⁸

The absolute number of Welsh speakers continued to rise in Wales before the First World War, even as the proportion fell below fifty per cent by 1911. Welsh was spoken at the chapel and the eisteddfod, and read in weekly newspapers, quarterly journals and a vibrant literary culture.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the same metaphor described a language retreating

westwards, away from the industrial valleys that attracted English and Irish labourers and into 'hilly districts',⁵⁰ or along the Llŷn Peninsula, beyond the reach of the 'tourist-tide'.⁵¹ Drawing on 1931 census data, D. Trevor Williams mapped the continuing trend showing that the Welsh language was spoken at a greater rate in upland areas, and one of the 'most complete' areas of anglicisation was along the north coastal plain between Llandudno and Prestatyn – a result of railway construction in the 1850s and the continuing popularity of the area among tourists.⁵² As the author Rhys Davies put it, the 'unusual loveliness of North Wales' which attracted so many tourists 'has been a curse' from the perspective of 'a nationalist preservation of the Cymric spirit'.⁵³

When faced with the linguistic diversity of the British-Irish Isles, both in language and in accent, commentators displayed a range of views including celebration and genuine interest, disdain, derisive humour, and a mixed response neatly captured by the terms 'sentimental condescension' and 'repressive tolerance'.⁵⁴ They seemed to agree, though, that the Celt's affinity for creativity and sentimentality could be heard in the voices of the local population. The archaeologist R. A. S. MacAlister, for instance, explained how the Irish spoken in Connacht was 'more expressive and more musical' than elsewhere,⁵⁵ and in Cornwall Ellis claimed that the language of the people 'scarcely sounds English to the stranger'. The marker of difference in Cornwall was not the language itself, of course, but rather the 'inflection of the Cornish voice', which 'rises in a musical wave to a climax reached about the antepenultimate syllable' – a 'soft inflection', Ellis continued, that 'breaks as gratefully as the ripple of the Cornish summer sea on the rocks' in contrast to the 'harshness of English voices'.⁵⁶

There were exceptions, of course, such as the 'grim austerities' of an outdoor Presbyterian service in Skye, where, MacCulloch wrote, the Gaelic singing and the preacher's voice had 'a certain romantic quaintness', but the overriding impression was of 'the most narrow of Puritanic sects and the barbaric chant of some forgotten but indigenous paganism'.⁵⁷ More in keeping with the stereotype of the musical Celt was the suggestion made by Harry Batsford and Charles Fry, that the Gaelic 'still widely spoken about the Highlands' was 'vigorous in address, rich in assertion, and, perhaps as the result of the ingrained enthusiasm of the Celt for story-telling and poetry, graceful, picturesque and witty in its phrasing'.⁵⁸

Perhaps most indulgent was Morton, who heard a girls' choir singing in a Caernarfonshire school in preparation for the upcoming eisteddfod in Bangor. The choir sang mournfully, in Welsh, about a slate quarryman injured during an accident, followed by a 'savage' rendition of *Cymru'n Un* (Wales United). The song, wrote Morton, sounded like 'centuries of pride interpreted in sound', the voice of 'old Wales defying Saxon, Norman

and English', and it made the English visitor 'feel like the enemy'. Finally, voices of defiance became complementary when the schoolgirls sang in English and brought a romantic feel to some Elizabethan madrigals by singing them 'beautifully, but a trifle sadly'. Welsh singing had, therefore, evoked both the 'old romantic and darkly passionate voice of Britain' and 'Merrie England in a faint mist'.⁵⁹

There was plenty of disdain and dismissiveness in travel books, too. A note of condescension entered *Ward and Lock's North Wales* (1883), which promised to 'not inflict the Welsh on our readers' when describing the songs of Maelgwyn's bards.⁶⁰ Similarly, another guidebook noted the 'amusement which visitors may derive' from the 'phonetic perplexities' of Welsh place-names.⁶¹ Writing in 1935, Edmund Vale lamented the 'unfair treatment' given to the Welsh language in hackneyed jibes that claimed an Englishman's attempt to pronounce Welsh words would 'incur the grave physical risk of a broken jaw'.⁶²

A sterner line of criticism focused on the perceived impracticality of languages such as Welsh, Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Cornish. In an introductory section on the Irish language, *Black's Ireland* (1900) quoted the view of classicist John Pentland Mahaffy, who denounced the Irish language movement as a 'fuss' that was both 'amusing' and 'melancholy'. Mahaffy argued it impractical to insist 'upon our youth re-learning their nearly extinct language', and that 'the use of a distinct national language would not necessarily sustain a direct national spirit'.⁶³ The lack of practical utility was also the reason that the Penguin guide to Cornwall (1939) dismissed the revival of Cornish, 'which is quite adequate for announcing that the pig is in the river, but useless for buying a packet of cigarettes'.⁶⁴

There were, then, strict limits on the extent to which the linguistic differences of the west were tolerated. The *Thorough Guide: Highlands and Islands* (1884) made this clear when, after the Ordnance Survey map adopted vernacular spellings of place-names, the guidebook despaired at the 'strict' and 'remorseless' 'Gaelicism', which produced a map that represented an 'abiding illustration of the Gaelic tongue' but was 'most bewildering' to those who wished to use the map for 'ordinary purposes, especially those of the tourist'. The publication did not wish to quarrel with the Gael 'for maintaining the integrity of his own language' but maintained that 'Saxon' spelling should have been included, given that 'these maps are paid for by the nation at large and not by any particular section of it'.⁶⁵

In many publications it was made explicit that cultural and linguistic differences could be tolerated and even celebrated as long as this did not stray into political nationalism. For instance, *Murray's Ireland* (1906) celebrated the 'Gaelic movement' for having 'revived the study of the Irish language and literature' along with music, dramatic art and 'old Irish

sports and pastimes', but insisted that the movement would only succeed in 'brightening the homes and enriching the lives of the peasantry' if it 'keeps itself free from the intrusion of that plague of things Irish, politics'.⁶⁶ Similarly, in his introductory essay in the *Blue Guide: Wales* (1922), H. J. Fleure claimed that the success of Welsh nationalism in winning 'the special respect and sympathy of the other inhabitants of Britain' was due to its pursuit of 'spiritual rather than political ends'.⁶⁷

For all the jokes, intolerance and sentimental condescension, the complementary model of Celt and the Saxon also carved out a space for the celebration of linguistic and cultural differences, and this space was occupied by unionists and nationalists alike. Historians tend to emphasise the condescending tone of Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), and draw attention to Arnold's call for the death of the Welsh language.⁶⁸ However, Welsh nationalists such as T. E. Ellis felt no shame in quoting Arnold when describing the 'Celtic elements' that provided Britain with its 'special power and genius'.⁶⁹ In a speech on 'The Influence of the Celt in the Making of Britain' (1889), Ellis singled out Arnold for his appreciation of 'the Celtic genius', which had helped to arm the Welsh against 'spasmodic and aggressive outbursts of literary Jingoism', otherwise known as 'Anglo-Saxonism' or "'Rule Britannia" fever'.⁷⁰ Yeats did not dismiss Arnold and Renan outright, either, instead hoping to take what was 'helpful' and discard the 'hurtful'.⁷¹ In discussions of the national character, racial mixtures and linguistic differences could reinforce a sense of national distinctiveness while also strengthening Britishness.⁷² As the historian and cultural nationalist O. M. Edwards put it in *A Short History of Wales* (1906), some races 'have more imagination' while others have 'more energy and practical wisdom', and the 'best nations have both' because 'many races have been blended in their making'.⁷³

Centuries of conflict and union

Narratives of Britishness which began with vast epochs of geological time and moved through millennia of racial and linguistic developments culminated in centuries of historical conflict that were apparently resolved through a series of mutually beneficial political unions. Travel books shaped the national consciousness of a public that consumed history in many forms. As Paul Readman has shown, the popularity of history books grew in Britain in the decades before 1914, while local newspapers reported the activities of archaeological and historical societies in detail. Antiquarianism remained popular in this period, and well-attended historical pageants brought scenes from history to life for participants and

observers alike, while the growing preservation movement sought to protect historic buildings and landscapes such as the commons. Travel literature, which proliferated in this period, was also historically minded, and educated holidaymakers and armchair tourists about the past.⁷⁴ Travel books were important sources of information which, as Rudy Koshar has observed, shaped the public's understanding of the nation as a community with historical continuity. In guidebooks, tourism and the nation 'met on hallowed cultural ground'.⁷⁵

Historically minded travel literature conveyed a distinctive sense of place and at the same time connected local events and individuals to a broader historical narrative. Potentially problematic episodes of this history – such as recurrent Welsh rebellions, the Civil Wars and the Jacobite risings – were often closely associated with western and borderland locations. The narratives that emerged put a unionist spin on these events, which became key moments in the story of the inevitable transition from brave and heroic resistance to mutually beneficial union. In this way, as Readman argues, 'blood-soaked' landscapes that were 'powerfully evocative' of historical conflict were also important for the construction of what Graeme Morton calls 'unionist-nationalism', in which the proud articulation of national defiance can coexist with the claim that the United Kingdom is a 'union of equals'. The landscapes of the west accommodated regional, national and transnational narratives of nationhood, displaying the 'plural and complexly imbricated' nature of British identities.⁷⁶

Narratives of union

Descriptions of Cornwall's history were detailed and wide-ranging in travel literature, but most writers included a handful of historical episodes that connected Cornwall with English and British history. Fowey, for instance, was famous for the 47 ships and 770 men who left its harbour to join Edward III's fleet for the siege of Calais (1346–47),⁷⁷ and when passing through Plymouth and the Cornish Mount Edgcumbe it was common for writers to look towards the Channel and contemplate England's victory against the Spanish Armada in 1588.⁷⁸ Near Falmouth, St Mawes Castle offered tourists another example of English coastal fortifications. The castle was built by Henry VIII who, travel writers and guidebooks often mentioned, honeymooned with Anne Boleyn in nearby St Just in Roseland.⁷⁹ Cornish locations were also connected to the Civil Wars, whether they were the sites of victory such as Braddock Down and Stratton that elicited Charles I's letter of thanks to Cornish Royalists,⁸⁰ or Tresilian Bridge, which marked the spot where the Royalist Cornish forces surrendered to Fairfax in 1646.⁸¹

Cornwall's contributions to Britain were evident in the more recent period of the Napoleonic Wars. In that 'stirring epoch', recounted the Great Western Railway's *Cornish Riviera* (1905), Sir Edward Pellew (whose family was from western Cornwall) and John Borlase Warren sailed against the French, and the prizes taken 'were constantly brought into Falmouth port for adjudication and sale'.⁸² For historians such as A. L. Rowse, it was 'not surprising that we should presume to interpret England's story in a West Country setting'.⁸³

The bulk of Cornwall's contributions to Britain came from the granite quarries of Cheesewring and Penryn, which, as various guidebooks noted, provided the stone 'so extensively used in many important structures in London' such as Westminster and Waterloo bridges and the Duke of Wellington's sarcophagus in St Paul's Cathedral, as well as Chatham docks, many of the London docks and Plymouth breakwater.⁸⁴ The kaolin or china clay industry, with its centre near St Austell, exported its wares across the world and secured Cornwall's place in British manufacturing.⁸⁵ In addition to historical events, granite and china clay, contributions also came in the form of Cornish 'worthies', who ranged from King Arthur to the chemist Sir Humphry Davy, the engineer and inventor of the high-pressure steam engine Richard Trevithick, the travel writer George Borrow, the novelist Arthur Quiller-Couch and a host of lesser known 'characters'.⁸⁶

More complicated were the landscapes of north Wales and Skye, which were more often associated with episodes of conflict with the English. Historical narratives of Wales typically began in the post-Roman period with Cunedda who, it was recited, played a formative role in uniting the Iberian, Goidel and Brython as fellow countrymen, or Cymry, in the face of invasions from Ireland from the west and Anglo-Saxons from the east. A familiar cast of historical characters followed the story of Wales through its great leaders such as Maelgwyn, King Alfred's contemporary Rhodri Mawr, and the lawmaker Hywel Dda. However, more space was generally reserved for the late medieval and early modern story of Norman conquest, rebellion and the sixteenth-century political union. *Ward Lock's North Wales* (1883), for instance, dedicated nearly a quarter of its seventeen-page historical introduction to 'Edward's Conquest of Wales', and this section of the guidebook was bookended by images of Edward I and Edward II, 'The First English Prince of Wales'.⁸⁷ Key episodes of rebellion included the risings of Llywelyn ap Iowerth in 1211, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282, and Owain Glyndŵr between 1400 and 1415,⁸⁸ and this history was so closely associated with conquest and resistance that the language of invading or plundering became a metaphor for travelling into Wales.⁸⁹

Guidebooks and travel writers revelled in descriptions of the fighting that preceded political union, and the castles of the region were monuments

to this bloody struggle. Dolbadarn Castle, built by Llywelyn ap Iowerth on the shores of Llyn Padarn to protect the Llanberis Pass through the mountains, was later used by Owain Glyndŵr to imprison Lord and Lady Grey of Ruthin, so told *Burrow's Guide to North Wales* (c.1923).⁹⁰ George Eyre-Todd described the history of Maelgwyn's medieval Deganwy Castle, built on the River Conwy, which was captured by Henry III from Llywelyn ap Iowerth and rebuilt in stone only for Llywelyn ap Gruffudd to besiege it with Henry inside. The king escaped, but the castle did not, and it was destroyed by the Prince of Wales.⁹¹ Overshadowing the Welsh castles were the Norman fortresses at Flint, Rhuddlan, Conwy, Caernarfon, Beaumaris and Harlech, built by Edward I during and after his conquest of Wales (1277–83). These imposing structures, with their thick walls, towers, portcullises and doorways, were symbols of invasion and annexation, but they also became grand stages for the story of the union. Caernarfon Castle was particularly important because Edward I summoned the Welsh chiefs there and, according to Eyre-Todd:

when they called out that they would acknowledge no prince but one born in Wales, who would speak to them in the Welsh tongue, he produced to them his infant son, born a few days previously in Carnarvon itself. 'Here', he cried, 'is your prince, born in Wales, and I undertake that he shall speak to you in the Welsh tongue'.⁹²

In this retelling, the story of subjugation was replaced by one of negotiated authority. As *Ward Lock's North Wales* (1883) put it, the Welsh 'were not subdued' and retained their loyalty to a prince who was, technically, Welsh.⁹³ This is a plainly unionist and controversial reading of history, which was, and remains, fiercely contested by many people in Wales. However, in the early twentieth century Caernarfon Castle became an important location for the celebration of Welshness within a multinational interpretation of Britishness. As John Ellis has shown, the revival of the Investiture of the Prince of Wales ceremony in 1911 was a vibrant articulation of 'a sense of Britishness reconciling ethnic diversity within a multinational state'.⁹⁴ Amid the ruins of Caernarfon Castle, seventeen-year-old Prince Edward (the future King Edward VIII) was formally recognised as the Prince of Wales and heir to the throne. In the castle courtyard, daffodils, dragons, and leeks adorned the crumbling medieval walls; an image of St David – the patron saint of Wales – was placed above the royal canopy; and the ceremony concluded with a rousing rendition of the Welsh national anthem. The event was widely publicised on film, in photographs, and in newspaper columns throughout the country and the Empire, and its message was aimed as much at the Irish as at the Welsh. At a time when John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party held the balance of power in

Westminster and Home Rule was back on the Liberal agenda, the Investiture demonstrated how a distinctive culture and strong sense of nationality could be reconciled with the British state.⁹⁵ The monarchy also became associated with Welsh cultural revival, and in 1894 the future Edward VII and his wife Alexandra were made members of the Gorsedd.⁹⁶

The pageantry of the Investiture was not exceptional, and two years earlier the Cardiff National Pageant reenacted Welsh history through a series of heroes before concluding with the story of the union and, like the Conway Pageant in 1927, with renditions of the Welsh national anthem followed by 'God Save the King'.⁹⁷ Pageantry grew in popularity in interwar Wales, and a few years after the First World War the pageant at Harlech Castle (1922) used the site of past oppression for a performance that emphasised the futility of war, while at the Aberystwyth pageant (1935) audiences were encouraged to draw parallels between 1283 and 1918, when periods of bloodshed were followed by peace.⁹⁸ At these events, centuries of conflict were reinterpreted as a prelude to peace and union that could be satisfactory to a population that combined their distinctive Welsh national identity with membership of the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, the castles were symbols of and tributes to what Morton called 'the fighting qualities of the Welsh'.⁹⁹ Apart from reminding readers of the long and violent wars between English kings and Welsh princes, it supported a constructive interpretation of historical conflict whereby the loyalty and bravery of the Welsh was appropriated by the British nation. As Morton explained, the Welsh fought battles against 'the might of England', but this was subsequently manifested in military contributions to shared efforts.¹⁰⁰ He explained that the 'ancient Britons who inhabit these mountains' fought against 'Roman, Saxon, Norman, English', and 'when they were not fighting against the English they were fighting with them'.¹⁰¹ In spite of the narratives of conquest and resistance described above, Morton declared that 'the Welsh are our oldest allies', and pointed out that 'five thousand Welsh archers and spearmen fought with us at Crecy' (1346), while they also 'drew their bows at Agincourt' (1415). In these and many other battles, the Welsh longbow 'became the national weapon of England'.¹⁰²

The second major historical episode of unification centred on the accession of Henry Richmond to the English throne as Henry VII when, as George Borrow put it, 'a prince of Cumric blood won the crown of fair Britain'.¹⁰³ According to *Jenkinson's North Wales* (1878), the fact that Henry was the grandson of Owain Tudor, a 'Welsh gentleman of princely descent', gave 'exceeding satisfaction to the Welsh'.¹⁰⁴ O. M. Edwards made the same claim in *A Short History of Wales* (1906), and suggested that during the Wars of the Roses 'the people of Wales welcomed Henry as a Welshman

who would rule them kindly and justly'.¹⁰⁵ The Tudor monarchy was also important because it was in the 1530s and 1540s that the union was formalised, and, as *Black's North Wales* (1883) put it, the 'brave people' were made 'fellow-citizens with their conquerors'.¹⁰⁶ As a result, the union became a settled historical matter, and *Baedeker's Great Britain* (1910) declared confidently that Wales 'has been an integral and undisputed part of the British monarchy since 1535'.¹⁰⁷ In *Ward Lock's North Wales* (1883), the union saw Wales formally incorporated into the United Kingdom and, as a result, the Welsh were granted 'all English privileges'.¹⁰⁸ Edwards echoed these sentiments when he explained that during the Tudor period the Welsh people 'became united, law-abiding, patriotic, and prosperous'. '[I]t was called an Act of Union', Edwards concluded, because 'Wales and England were united on equal terms'.¹⁰⁹ This reading of the union was compatible with a more assertive Welsh identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which also found an institutional expression of national pride in the University Colleges of Wales at Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff (which received royal assent in 1893), the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth (approved by the government in 1905) and the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff (established by Royal Charter in 1907).¹¹⁰

Much like north Wales, Skye was also the setting for a series of glamourised conflicts followed by integration and contribution to the British nation and Empire. Every location had its historical associations, including the village of Kyleakin, the point of entry for many travellers to Skye and supposedly named after the Norwegian King Haakon IV, who passed through the strait with his armada in 1263.¹¹¹ The steamer also stopped at Portree – 'the king's port' – which, it was said, derived its name from James V's visit in 1540.¹¹² Six miles north-west of Portree the travel books recommended St Columba's Isle, which marked the spot where the saint stood on an isolated boulder 'and preached the gospel to the heathen Celts'.¹¹³ But beyond the spread of Christianity and periods of Nordic rule, the historical narratives of Skye were dominated by two themes: the bloody feuds between the clans of MacLeod and Macdonald, and the flight of Bonnie Prince Charlie in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion (1745–6).

The battles between Clan MacLeod and Clan Macdonald of Sleat took place all over the island, and the travel literature indulged in gory descriptions of blood and slaughter. In *Black's Guide to Scotland: North* (1920), Mitton recounted the story associated with the ruined church at Trumpan, on the Vaternish peninsula, which was a monument to an atrocity. The Macdonalds, who landed from Uist, found a group of their MacLeod enemies at worship, and set the church alight with the congregation inside. Only one woman escaped to tell the tale.¹¹⁴ MacCulloch, in *Misty Isle of*

Skye (1905), explained that the attack of the Macdonalds was made in revenge for a massacre at Eigg, and, after watching their fire burn 'with savage glee' they were in turn slain after the MacLeods saw the smoke from Dunvegan. The cycle continued, and the Macdonalds returned for a cattle raid that ended in another battle near Trumpan where Roderick, son of Ian MacLeod of Unish, had his legs cut at the knees but 'continued to stand on his stumps cutting down all comers' before eventually falling himself.¹¹⁵

Travel writers and guidebooks spared no detail in their descriptions of these battles. The Bloody Stone, in Harta Corrie, marked the spot where the MacLeods and Macdonalds fought in 1398 'until', one guidebook wrote, 'blood ran like water'.¹¹⁶ Likewise, at another battle near the head of Loch Caroy, MacCulloch claimed that the bloodshed was so great that 'the heather was dyed a deeper purple with the blood of the clansmen'.¹¹⁷ Some of the romanticised stories of violent adventure took on an almost mythical quality, evident in MacCulloch's description of the Loch Caroy battle which, he wrote, was fought 'in the mist, like that other *last weird battle in the West*' described by Tennyson in 'The Passing of Arthur'.¹¹⁸ The landscapes of Skye became the archetypal setting for imagining the stereotypical Highland clansman and his bloody feuds. MacCulloch wondered at the 'peaceful beauty' of the Vaternish peninsula and its 'savage traditions' of men who 'lived only for the lust of fighting and slaughter', while the 'wild' landscape at Coire-na-Creiche, in the Cuillin, was matched by the 'shouts of war' and 'passions of men' that rang out in 1601, when the clans fought their last battle.¹¹⁹

Skye was also folded into the story of the Jacobite rebellion, when Charles Edward Stuart fled to the island after his defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. This episode of conflict was much more recent than the medieval struggles between England and Wales, but the '45 was soon glamourised and romanticised once the political threat of the Highland warriors had been extinguished.¹²⁰ The Stuart Prince was a sympathetic character in the guidebooks, which described his 'sorry plight' after 'the fateful day of Culloden'.¹²¹ MacCulloch made it clear that 'our sympathies are equally divided between the victims of the butcher Cumberland's cruelty and the Prince as he wandered, hunted and homeless, with a price on his head that tempted nobody'.¹²²

After Culloden, the Prince's wanderings took him to South Uist where, pursued by soldiers, he was disguised as an Irish servant and smuggled to Skye with the aid of Flora Macdonald. The tourist's journey to Skye typically passed the island of Raasay, and the guidebooks rarely failed to point out that this was the place where 'Prince Charlie was sheltered for one night' in 1746.¹²³ Skye, too, was famous for 'intimate associations' with

the 'weary odyssey' of Bonnie Prince Charlie,¹²⁴ and tourists could visit 'Prince Charlie's Cave', where, so it was said, he found refuge for a night – although the claim was doubtful.¹²⁵ Among the treasures at Dunvegan castle were letters written by Prince Charlie to the chief of Clan MacLeod,¹²⁶ and at Kingsburgh House tourists could look upon the ruins of another place where 'the Royal fugitive slept for a night', and where Dr Johnson 'sat listening with eager attention to Flora Macdonald' herself.¹²⁷

The association between Skye and the Jacobite cause was not a straightforward one, though, because after supporting the rising of 1715 the chiefs of clans MacLeod and Macdonald raised forces for George II in 1745. Nevertheless, Skye was redeemed in MacCulloch's narrative by virtue of the clansmen, many of whom, upon learning that they were mustered to fight against the Stuart Prince, 'went off on their own account to join him'.¹²⁸ Moncrieff also suggested that, while 'not many' Macdonalds, MacLeods, or MacKinnons 'turned out to take risks in his [Prince Charlie's] rash enterprise' they had in part redeemed themselves by 'not very keenly play[ing] the bloodhound upon the fugitive's doublings' and thus assisting his escape.¹²⁹

The 'Soldier Sons' of Skye had, as MacKinnon pointed out, also demonstrated their fierce loyalty and fighting qualities in support of Robert the Bruce in 1314 and Charles II in 1651.¹³⁰ And, as in the case of Wales, this history was told as a tale of brave but doomed military resistance that was transformed into a valuable contribution to the British armed forces. This implication was made explicit by Quigley, who added Montrose's campaigns during the Civil Wars to the story of Britain, in which two nations 'coalesced into one State'.¹³¹ This popular history was in the mould of Sir Walter Scott, whose novels depicted historical conflict as part of a teleological narrative of British integration.¹³² During the Napoleonic Wars, for instance, MacKinnon counted '21 Lieutenant-Generals and Major-Generals, 45 Lieutenant-Colonels, 600 Majors, Captains, and other commissioned officers, 120 pipers, 10,000 foot soldiers, and one Adjutant-General' among Skye's British Army recruits.¹³³

The fighting qualities of the Highland clans – unacceptable when perceived as a domestic threat – also became prized attributes in the imperial context.¹³⁴ In *A Summer in Skye* (1885), Alexander Smith described how the people of the Highlands 'have wielded the sword industriously', contributing 'in every Peninsular and Indian battle-field'. In particular, Skye 'has itself given to the British and Indian armies at least a dozen generals', while others have set forth 'to plant indigo in Bengal or coffee in Ceylon'.¹³⁵ Highland soldiers were often singled out for praise for their contributions in Crimea, during the Indian Rebellion (1857–8), during the Ashantee War (1873), in Dargai on the North West Frontier (1895), and in the second

Anglo–South African War (1899–1902).¹³⁶ In the interwar period, the Great War became part of the same narrative, and Donald MacKinnon counted 2,000 Skyemen who fought in ‘France and Flanders, in Egypt, the Dardenelles, and in Mesopotamia’.¹³⁷ According to one guidebook, the National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle ‘is not only a monument to the brave dead; it is the expression of a living spirit’.¹³⁸ Just as the Welsh had retained their nationality as fellow citizens, it was made clear that Scotland’s nationality also remained undiluted. The military contributions were overtly Scottish, and Highland regiments wore their tartan and were often led by family members of clan chiefs. In the British armed forces, symbols of Highland Scotland and clan identity could flourish within an overarching sense of Britishness.¹³⁹

In an article on the ‘History of Scotland’, which appeared in *Ward and Lock’s Complete Scotland* (1933), the Scottish historian J. D. Mackie asserted that, ‘often defeated, the Scots managed to hold their own until accident of dynasty produced the Union of the Crowns in 1603’, and ‘in spite of’ two centuries of union from 1707, the nation ‘maintains her nationality intact at the present day’. Through the narrative of brave yet doomed resistance, and a unification of the crowns, Scotland became ‘a part of the United Kingdom’, and remained ‘keenly conscious of her own individuality’.¹⁴⁰ Quoting Alexander Smith’s *A Summer in Skye*, MacKinnon extolled the achievements of the Highlanders, who waved the tartans ‘through the smoke of every British battle’, and ‘in her time of need Britain never called in vain to the men of Skye’.¹⁴¹ This was a constructive union, evident in the ‘Empire-builders’ and colonial governors who went forth ‘from the glens and straths’ of the Highlands.¹⁴² In these narratives, historical conflict need not threaten the political integrity of the British state, which was able to contain and also to celebrate Scottish as well as Welsh national difference.

Writers such as George Birkbeck Hill and Morton constructed entertaining scenes around the theme of an unthreatening and romantic Highland spirit. During his stay in Portree while tracing the *Footsteps of Dr Johnson* (1890), Hill spotted ‘a company of Highland volunteers’ dressed in tartan plaids and kilts, and accompanied by the bagpipes as they underwent their annual inspection. This, of course, brought to Hill’s mind the ‘days of their forefathers’ when ‘twelve Highlanders and a bagpipe made a rebellion’ and laws against Highland arms and dress would have seen these men ‘sent off by summary process to serve as a common soldier’. This troubled history was quickly dispelled by Hill, who confirmed that ‘we live in loyal days’, and the only punishment at risk of being received by these men was ‘a fine of five shillings for being drunk and disorderly’, which from Hill’s perspective became more likely as the evening progressed. ‘Let us hope’,

remarked Hill dryly, 'that their excess was little more than an excess of loyalty in drinking the health of a Hanoverian queen'.¹⁴³

Morton's anecdote emphasised the sentimental memory of Bonnie Prince Charlie during a night of singing in his Aberdeen hotel. Having purchased a first edition of Hogg's songbook *Jacobite Relics of Scotland*, Morton set in motion an evening of drinking and singing the 'old rebel songs' with a group of men in the smoking room and Maggie from the hotel reception on the piano. After enthusiastic renditions of 'Bonnie Charlie' followed by 'The Wee, Wee German Lairdie', 'MacLean's Welcome', and 'Will He No' Come Back Again?' the singers were 'wearing white cockades in our hearts'¹⁴⁴ and 'mourned that we were born two centuries too late'. In this songbook was 'the heart of the Highlands', and so inspired was Morton that he asked himself which of them would not 'gladly have expired on the Hanoverian bayonets at Culloden?' Far from spilling over into any real hostility, the atmosphere of 'violent prejudice, primitive hatred, scornful contempt, sly humour, and reckless sincerity' was soon dissipated as some members of the group became aware of their 'sentimentalism' and 'romanticism'. Morton's shift of tone was completed in characteristic fashion, by undercutting the atmosphere built over several pages, when one of the singers commented that the Prince of Wales was 'the only prince in modern Europe whose charm recalls that of Bonnie Prince Charlie', at which point Maggie looked forward in excitement to the prince visiting Aberdeen to open the new water works.¹⁴⁵

Narratives of hope

Triumphant narratives of union did not easily translate to historical accounts of Ireland, where conflict could not be placed safely in the past. Instead, the discussion inevitably slipped into contemporary politics, culminating in expressions of hope that the conflict might yet be resolved.

Locations such as Galway Bay were connected to a broader historical narrative through major events such as the failed invasion of England by the Spanish Armada in 1588. After failing to escort soldiers from Flanders to England due to adverse weather conditions and repeated attacks by English ships, the Armada returned to Spain via the Scottish and Irish coast. *Black's Ireland* (1877) recalled that one of the retreating ships was wrecked in Galway Bay, and over seventy of the crew died. Along the coast 'several other vessels were lost', and the survivors were massacred on the orders of Sir William FitzWilliam, Lord Deputy of Ireland.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, another narrative strategy familiar to readers of Welsh and Scottish guidebooks was history told through the expansion of English

power. But, unlike the Welsh and Scottish narratives, the emphasis was on conquest and defeat rather than on brave resistance and integration. In the section on Galway, *Murray's Handbook for Ireland* (1906) began the story in 1226, when the Anglo-Norman Richard Mór de Burgh received his king's approval to invade Connacht. De Burgh captured Galway in 1232 and rebuilt the fortifications, after which time the city 'became a flourishing English colony'.¹⁴⁷ The story continued when Richard II (r. 1377–99) granted a charter of incorporation for the city of Galway, which remained loyal to the king during the Irish Rebellion (1641) but suffered 'barbarous treatment at the hands of the Parliamentary army' before surrendering to Edmund Ludlow in 1652. Finally, after the battle of Aughrim (1691) during the Williamite Wars, Ginkell laid siege to Galway city, which surrendered after a couple of days.¹⁴⁸ The local history of Galway in *Murray's Handbook* reflects the way this guidebook and many others depicted Ireland as 'always the "home of lost causes"', where the 'curse of Cromwell' could still be sensed by the tourist.¹⁴⁹

Unlike their Welsh and Scottish counterparts, the Irish were not celebrated for their contributions to the British armed forces and empire. There was no shortage of material for constructing such a narrative, because the population of Ireland was consistently over-represented in the British armed forces in the nineteenth century. In 1830, for instance, the Irish made up less than one-third of the total population of the United Kingdom but accounted for over forty-two per cent of soldiers in the British Army. At this time, there were more Irish soldiers than English in the army, and the Irish remained over-represented to the end of the century.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, [Chapter 5](#) discussed the rising stock of the Irish soldier, who was praised by Munro for strengthening the British Empire. After their successful contributions to the second Anglo–South African War (which compared favourably with Highland units), Irish soldiers also won praise from Queen Victoria, who visited Dublin on St Patrick's Day in 1900 and established the Irish Guards in recognition of their bravery and loyalty. In addition, Irish regiments were permitted to wear shamrock during Victoria's visit, thereby appropriating an Irish national emblem and angering pro-Boer Irish nationalists. St Patrick's Day in 1900 became a public celebration of Irish soldiers, who were widely praised in the popular press.¹⁵¹

However, lists of contributions made by the Irish to the defence of Britain and the expansion of the Empire were absent from the guidebooks. Alvin Jackson has suggested that the Irish received less public recognition because of the alternative military tradition in Ireland which, from the 1790s to the 1910s, meant that the British state 'could not claim exclusive rights over the loyalties of Irish fighters'.¹⁵² After the Great War, for instance, Scottish soldiers were commemorated in a National War Memorial which

used the 'iconography of union and monarchy', whereas the contributions made by Irish soldiers were discussed in the context of the debates about self-government. The 'Irishness reinforced in the trenches', argues Jackson, had the potential to feed into republican activism in a way that simply did not occur in Scotland and Wales.¹⁵³

Furthermore, to be convincing, the story of conflict followed by union required that the period of antagonism be perceived as distant, and in the safety of the historical past. When it came to Ireland, this story simply could not be told, because in touching on the subject of the union guidebooks and travel writers inevitably slipped into the difficult realm of contemporary politics. Returning to *Murray's Handbook for Ireland* (1906), the introductory historical sketch told the story of the union through a series of events including the repeal of Poyning's Law, the rise of the United Irishmen, and the suppression of the 1798 rebellion, culminating in the Acts of Union (1800). But, in place of a triumphant description of a settled historical matter, the union remained an open question about which '[m]uch sentiment has been expended'. At this point, the historical narrative slipped unavoidably into politics, which put the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829) alongside 'legislation of recent years' such as the Local Government (Ireland) Act (1898) and the Land Acts (1870–1906). As a result, the 'transformation' of local government from 'the hands of the classes to the hands of the masses', and a similarly transformative 'transference of property' led the guidebook to look forward to 'the fuller development of her [Ireland's] resources' and a 'full and true solution' to 'that vexed "Irish question"' effected in measures 'ever devised in the United Kingdom'.¹⁵⁴

Such hopeful sentiments were repeated by many travel writers, who also slipped between centuries of historical conflict and contemporary politics. In *The Charm of Ireland* (1914), for instance, Burton E. Stevenson could not separate centuries of history from politics when, on the road between Galway, Clifden and Leenaun, his attempt to explain the current situation of the 'congested districts' began with the period '[a]fter Cromwell had subdued Ireland'.¹⁵⁵ Stevenson trod carefully, and made it clear he did not wish to 'judge a seventeenth-century Parliament by twentieth-century ideals', but this was a difficult prelude to a discussion of the work carried out by the Congested Districts Board.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, Madame de Bovet connected the present 'suffering of the western counties' with the 'great transplanting effected by Cromwell in 1654'.¹⁵⁷

In an attempt to reassure his readers, Stevenson confirmed that by 1914 the trouble of the 'Land League days' had been 'solved', so that the Irish people and visiting tourists 'can afford to forget the past', while, writing in 1908, William Eleroy Curtis also noted that the land agitations were 'gentle and mild' disturbances when compared with 'the land wars of the

past'.¹⁵⁸ The hopeful and reassuring tone remained a feature of the genre after the Partition of Ireland and the establishment of the Free State. For Morton, the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1922) marked the end of centuries of 'racial war', and he looked forward to the day when the troubles of the past could be treated with 'a sense of historical perspective'. Similarly, Stephen Gwynn understood the traveller's desire to know about 'recent events, as well as of what has passed into settled history'.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the interwar period the conflict over land tenure was replaced by new sites of tension, including the trade wars between Britain and Ireland and the difficulties of policing the border between Northern Ireland and the Free State.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

The final two chapters of this book suggest that, in addition to their importance for national identity and for projects of separatist nationalism, western landscapes were also at the heart of a multinational and pluralistic version of Britishness in the years before the Partition of Ireland. There were many layers to this ambitious vision, beginning with geological sequences that ordered the layers of the landscape and spatialised historical time. This provided a framework for understanding the racial, historical, linguistic and cultural layers of the British-Irish Isles, and the importance of the west at its foundation. As an important source of information, guidebooks and travel books drew on the varied disciplines of archaeology, anatomy, anthropology, history and philology, and shaped popular understandings of the composition of the nations in the British-Irish Isles. In the west, the 'Iberian' and 'Celtic' layers were deemed most expressive, and made important contributions to the British national character.

Above geological deep time and millennia of racial and linguistic developments rested the centuries of historical time, which described the enduring contributions made by Cornwall, the retention of Welsh nationality as fellow citizens and equals, and the Highland portion of Scottish nationality that remained undiluted after political union. In these narratives, historical associations of conflict and division did not threaten the political integrity of the British state. On the contrary, this history was one that celebrated Welsh and Scottish national differences and adopted them as a productive force in culture and in the armed forces. All of this indicated that multinational diversity could flourish within an overarching sense of Britishness, and travel writing encouraged what Colin Kidd has called 'a liberal and dignified Union' which 'involved a national component'.¹⁶¹ This is not to suggest that travel writers remained apolitical in

these places. Whether it was the decline of the Cornish mining industry,¹⁶² industrial relations at the Penrhyn quarries in Wales,¹⁶³ or the workings of the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act (1886) and the findings of the Napier Commission (1883) on Skye,¹⁶⁴ travellers remained committed to their self-proclaimed responsibility to investigate the social and economic conditions of the west. But crucially, this did not intrude on the triumphant narrative of inclusive and mutually beneficial union in the way that it did in Ireland, where the question of beneficial union was still an open one. In this sense, historical narratives of conflict and union revealed the varieties of, but also the challenges facing, Britishness in the west.

Notes

1. Leerssen, 'Celticism'.
2. In travel writing, contemporaries often included Ireland in what was called the 'British' nation.
3. Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 24.
4. This tendency is discussed in S. J. Connolly, 'Varieties of Britishness: Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the Hanoverian State', in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (Routledge, 1995), 193–207.
5. Williams, *The Welsh in Their History*, 194.
6. *Mr Gladstone and the Nationalities of the United Kingdom: A Series of Letters to the "Times" by Sir John Lubbock with Rejoinders by Mr J. Bryce, MP* (London, 1887), 7–13, letter of 18 March 1887, 12–13.
7. P. B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986), 20; see *Mr Gladstone and the Nationalities of the United Kingdom*, 7–13, letter of 18 March 1887. For an introduction to Lubbock's views on race, see Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination*, 215–18.
8. Rich, *Race and Empire*, 20–21; see *Mr Gladstone and the Nationalities of the United Kingdom*, 13–15, letter of 21 March 1887.
9. *Mr Gladstone and the Nationalities of the United Kingdom*, 43–4.
10. *Mr Gladstone and the Nationalities of the United Kingdom*, 12.
11. *Mr Gladstone and the Nationalities of the United Kingdom*, p. 20 for Lubbock, pp. 30–31 for Argyll.
12. R. Finlay, 'Scotland and Devolution, 1880–1945', in D. Tanner, C. Williams, W. P. Griffiths, A. Edwards (eds), *Debating Nationhood and Governance in Britain, 1885–1939* (Manchester, 2006), 27–44.
13. T. E. Ellis, 'Notes for Cymru Fydd', National Council, Newtown, 9 October 1888, in T. E. Ellis (and A. J. Ellis), *Speeches and Addresses by the Late T. E. Ellis* (Wrexham, 1912), 187–93, quotations at 193, 189.
14. A. Webb, *Edward Thomas and World Literary Studies: Wales, Anglocentrism and English Literature* (Cardiff, 2013), 93. For the Growth of Nationalism, see Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 114–21 and K. O. Morgan, 'Welsh Nationalism: The Historical Background', *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971), 153–72.

15. Kearney, *British Isles*, 290–91. In 1937, Davies suggested that undergraduate students in Wales's four university colleges 'largely support the Party', but that 'the industrial area of South Wales has not been captured'; see Davies, *My Wales* (1937), 278.
16. W. B. Dawkins, *The Place of the Welsh in the History of Britain* (London, 1889), 5–6. For a detailed discussion of Dawkins, see Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers'.
17. Dawkins, *Place of the Welsh* (1889), 5–6, 9–10, 14–15.
18. Dawkins, *Place of the Welsh* (1889), 36–7.
19. Dawkins, *Place of the Welsh* (1889), 45–7.
20. Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 929–30.
21. Munro, *British Race* (1899), 186.
22. Dawkins, *Place of the Welsh* (1889). This passage is also quoted in Manias, 'Our Iberian Forefathers', 929–30.
23. Dawkins, *Place of the Welsh* (1889), 48.
24. Munro, *British Race* (1899), 203.
25. Mandler, *English National Character*, 118.
26. Renan, 'Poetry of the Celtic Races' (1896), 5–9.
27. Arnold, *Study of Celtic Literature* (1900), 81–4.
28. Champion, 'Celt in Archaeology', 69–73.
29. Arnold, *Study of Celtic Literature* (1900), 81–4.
30. Mandler, *English National Character*, 118.
31. G. Allen, *Anglo-Saxon Britain* (London, 1884), 228–9.
32. Allen, *Anglo-Saxon Britain* (1884), 229.
33. T. W. Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race* (New York, 1911), viii.
34. W. and E. Sharp, *Lyra Celtica* (Edinburgh, 1896), xxiii–xxvii.
35. J. Leerssen, 'Englishness, Ethnicity and Matthew Arnold', *European Journal of English Studies* 10, no. 1 (2006), 63–79, at 69–70.
36. Ellis, 'Celtic Spirit in Literature' (1927), 221, 224–6, 232–5.
37. J. C. Roger, *Celticism A Myth* (London, 1884), 3, 12.
38. Roger, *Celticism* (1884), x.
39. J. M. Robertson, *The Saxon and the Celt: A Study in Sociology* (London, 1897), pp. ix–xii, 2, the preamble, and chapter 1.
40. W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1 (London, 1892), 397.
41. Robertson, *Saxon and Celt* (1897), v–vi, x.
42. E. Thomas, *Beautiful Wales* (London, 1905), 10–15, quotations at 11. This is discussed in Webb, *Edward Thomas*, 113, 143.
43. Robertson, *Saxon and Celt* (1897), xiii.
44. Morton, *In Search of England* (1931), see the opening of chapter 4.
45. Leerssen, 'Englishness, Ethnicity and Matthew Arnold', 68–9. James Urry notes that this idea had been posited since the 1830s, see his *Before Social Anthropology*, 84.
46. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 208.

47. K. T. Hoppen, 'Nationalist Mobilisation and Governmental Attitudes: Geography, Politics and Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, c.1750-c.1850*, ed. L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (Manchester, 1997), 162–78, at 164–5.
48. A. L. Salmon, *The Little Guides: Cornwall*, 6th edn (London, 1927 [1903]), 49.
49. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 20–21, 95.
50. Quotation from Dawkins, *Place of the Welsh* (1889), 46–7; also see Jenkinson's *North Wales* (1878), xxvi.
51. Baddeley and Ward, *Thorough North Wales I* (1889), 150.
52. D. T. Williams, 'A Linguistic Map of Wales According to the 1931 Census, with Some Observations on its Historical and Geographical Setting', *The Geographical Journal* 89, no. 2 (1937), 146–51, at 149–50. For the interwar period, see Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 245. Seaside towns on the north Wales coast were also, however, 'common venues for national eisteddfodau'; see P. Borsay, 'Welsh Seaside Resorts: Historiography, Sources and Themes', *Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru/Welsh Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (2008), 92–119, at 116–17.
53. Davies, *My Wales* (1937), 246.
54. Leerssen 'Celticism', 11–12. These contradictions have also been recognised in the sixteenth-century creation of a Protestant Welsh Bible to aid the survival of the language alongside 'official discrimination against and social scorn for that language'; see Williams, *The Welsh in their History*, 193. Luke Gibbons used the term 'benevolent colonialism', in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1996), 156.
55. R. A. S. MacAlister, 'Ancient Geography', in *Connaught*, ed. G. Fletcher (Cambridge, 1922), 1–4, at 4.
56. Ellis, 'Men of Cornwall' (April 1897), 328.
57. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 206.
58. Batsford and Fry, *Face of Scotland* (1934), 11.
59. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (1936), 66–9.
60. Ward and Lock's *North Wales* (1883), 69–70.
61. Baddeley and Ward, *Thorough North Wales I* (1889), xv.
62. E. Vale, 'Wales: The Spirit and the Face', in *The Beauty of Britain*, ed. J. B. Priestley (London, 1935), 160–76, at 161.
63. E. D. Jordan, *Black's Guide to Ireland*, 23rd edn (London, 1900), xxx.
64. Lambert, *Penguin Guides: Cornwall* (1939), 22.
65. M. J. B. Baddeley, ed., *Thorough Guide Series. The Northern Highlands and Islands*, 2nd edn (London, 1884), v–vi.
66. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 55.
67. Fleure, 'Land of Wales' (1922), xxvi.
68. For an exception, see H. Fulton, 'Matthew Arnold and the Canon of Medieval Welsh Literature', *The Review of English Studies, New Series* 63, no. 259 (April 2012), 204–24.
69. Ellis 'Notes for Cymru Fydd', 1888, 190–93.
70. T. E. Ellis, 'The Influence of the Celt in the Making of Britain', Manchester, 13 January 1889, in T. E. Ellis, T. E. (and A. J. Ellis), *Speeches and Addresses by the Late T. E. Ellis* (Wrexham, 1912), 85–115, at 85. In a meeting of the Society for the Utilisation of the Welsh Language in 1886, Ellis claimed that Arnold had reversed

his view on the Welsh language. See 'The Carnarvon Eisteddfod', *South Wales Daily News*, 15 September 1886, 3.

71. Yeats, 'Celtic Element in Literature' (1897), 272.

72. In contrast to Wales, Colin Kidd has argued that the awkward combination of Highland Gaelic and Lowland Teutonist identities stymied Scottish nationalism. See Kidd, 'Teutonist Ethnology', 45–68.

73. O. Edwards, *A Short History of Wales* (London, 1906), 8–9.

74. P. Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture, c.1890–1914', *Past and Present* 186, no. 1 (2005), 147–99, at 158–63, 68–70.

75. Koshar, 'Tourists' Guidebooks and National Identities', 339.

76. P. Readman, 'Living in a British Borderland: Northumberland and the Scottish Borders in the Long Nineteenth Century', in *Borderlands in World History*, ed. P. Readman, C. Radding and C. Bryant (Basingstoke, 2014), 169–91, especially 182–4, 186–7. Also see Readman, *Storied Ground*, 52–89. 'Blood-soaked' landscapes quotation from page 59. For the compatibility of an assertive Scottish nationalism within the union, see C. Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2008), 261–2.

77. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 236.

78. Norway, *Devon and Cornwall* (1897), 127, 133–4; Scott, *Corners of Cornwall* (1911), 161–3.

79. Morton, *In Search of England* (1931), 85–7.

80. *Black's Guide to the Duchy of Cornwall*, 13th edn (Edinburgh, 1885), xii; for the letter, Tregellas, *Cornwall* (1878), 10.

81. Harper, *Cornish Coast (South)* (1910), 113.

82. GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 45.

83. G. Beadle, 'Foreword', in *The West in English History*, ed. A. L. Rowse (London, 1949), 5–6.

84. Quotation from Tregellas, *Cornwall* (1878), 3; list from Ward and Baddeley, *Thorough Guide: South Devon and South Cornwall* (1924), 13.

85. Muirhead, *The Blue Guides: England* (1920), 180; GWR, *Cornish Riviera* (1905), 34.

86. Salmon, *Little Guides: Cornwall* (1905), 50–53; R. A. J. Walling, *The West Country* (New York, 1935), 28; W. H. Tregellas, *Cornish Worthies: Sketches of Some Eminent Cornish Men and Families*, vol. 1 (London, 1884), xv; For lesser known characters, see S. Baring-Gould, *Cornish Characters and Strange Events* (London, 1909).

87. *Ward and Lock's North Wales* (1883), 5, 18–21.

88. Eyre-Todd, *Through England and Scotland* (1903), 81–2, 87.

89. For 'plundering', see Marks, *Gallant Little Wales* (1912), viii; for the ways in which 'North Wales May Be Invaded', see *Ward and Lock's North Wales* (1883), 2. For similar references to Ireland, see Farquharson, 'The British Tourist' (1896), 339; London and North Western Railway, *Ireland for the Holidays* (London, 1911), 3; London and North Western Railway, *Ireland for the Holidays* (London, 1914), 3.

90. Piggott, *Burrow's North Wales* (c.1923), 47.

91. Eyre-Todd, *Through England and Scotland* (1903), 81–2.

92. Eyre-Todd, *Through England and Scotland* (1903), 86–7. Also see *Ward and Lock's North Wales* (1883), 20. Stawell places this event in Rhuddlan Castle, and, with more sympathy for the Welsh understanding of this event, describes it as a 'historical joke' played by Edward I 'upon the Welsh nation'; see Stawell, *Motor Tours in Wales* (1909), 84–5.

93. *Ward and Lock's North Wales* (1883), 20.
94. J. S. Ellis, 'Reconciling the Celt: British National Identity, Empire, and the 1911 Investiture of the Prince of Wales', *Journal of British Studies* 37, no. 4 (1998), 391–418, at 393.
95. Ellis, 'Reconciling the Celt', *passim*.
96. Stewart, 'Celticism', 152, 159 n98.
97. Cardiff National Pageant, accessed 1 February 2025, <https://historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1133/>; Conway, accessed 1 February 2025, <https://historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1040/>.
98. Harlech, accessed 1 February 2025, <http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1287/>, and Aberystwyth, accessed 1 February 2025, <https://historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/947/>.
99. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (1936), 63–5.
100. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (1936), 4.
101. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (1936), 71–2.
102. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (1936), 4.
103. G. Borrow, *Wild Wales* (London, 1888 [1862]), ix.
104. *Jenkinson's North Wales* (1878), lix–lx.
105. Edwards, *Short History of Wales* (1906), 80.
106. *Black's North Wales* (1883), 3.
107. J. F. Muirhead, ed., *Great Britain. Handbook for Travellers by K. Baedeker*, 7th edn (Leipzig, 1910), xxxiii.
108. *Ward and Lock's North Wales* (1883), 21.
109. Edwards, *Short History of Wales* (1906), 80–81.
110. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 110–11; M. Cragoe, *Culture, Politics, and National Identity in Wales, 1832–1886* (Oxford, 2004).
111. Batsford and Fry, *Face of Scotland* (1934), 34–5. The etymology is contested.
112. MacBrayne, *Summer Tours in Scotland* (1881), 53. This etymology is also contested.
113. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 55.
114. Mitton, *Black's Scotland, North* (1920), 245.
115. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 62–3.
116. Muirhead, *Blue Guides: Scotland* (1927), 379. For the Bloody Stone reference, see MacKinnon, *How to See Skye* (1937), 53. Donaldson, *Wanderings* (1923), 147.
117. MacCulloch, *The Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 93.
118. MacCulloch, *The Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 93.
119. MacCulloch, *The Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 64, 146–7.
120. Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland*, 52; J. R. Gold and M. M. Gold, "'The Graves of Gallant Highlanders': Memory, Interpretation and Narratives of Culloden", *History and Memory* 19, no. 1 (2007), 5–38.
121. Quotations from M. J. B. Baddeley, *Thorough Guide Series. The Highlands of Scotland* (London, 1881), 214; also see Moncrieff and Smith Jr., *Highlands and Islands* (1907), 127–8.
122. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 299.

123. S. M. Penney, ed., *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Scotland*, 8th edn (London, 1903), 436.
124. Batsford and Fry, *Face of Scotland* (1934), 37. For the powerful, romanticised associations of Culloden, see Gold and Gold, 'The Graves of Gallant Highlanders'.
125. The guidebooks made it clear that Charles' association with the cave was 'doubtful'; see *A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to Oban, Fort William, the Caledonian Canal, Iona, Staffa, and the Western Highlands*, 4th edn (London, n.d. [1906?]), 88; Muirhead, *Blue Guides: Scotland* (1927), 383.
126. Muirhead, *Blue Guides: Scotland* (1927), 382.
127. MacRae, *Guide to Skye* (1921), 57.
128. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 298–9.
129. Moncrieff and Smith Jr., *Highlands and Islands* (1907), 128.
130. MacKinnon, *How to See Skye* (1937), 11–12.
131. Quigley, *Highlands of Scotland* (1939), 107–15.
132. J. Leerssen, 'Introduction', in *Free Access to the Past: Romanticism, Cultural Heritage and the Nation*, ed. L. Jensen, J. Leerssen and M. Mathijsen (Leiden, 2010), xv–xxii, at xx. Also see J. Morrison, *Painting the Nation: Identity and Nationalism in Scottish Painting, 1800–1920* (Edinburgh, 2003), 47–8.
133. MacKinnon, *How to See Skye* (1937), 12.
134. Womack, *Improvement and Romance*, 29.
135. Smith, *Summer in Skye* (1885), 179–80.
136. Jackson, *The Two Unions*, 165–6.
137. MacKinnon, *How to see Skye* (1937), 12.
138. Mackie and Finlay, *Complete Scotland* (1933), 36.
139. For military casualties as a Scottish contribution to empire, see M. Pittock, "'To See Ourselves as Others See Us': The Scot in English Eyes Since 1707", *European Journal of English Studies* 13, no. 3 (2009), 293–304, at 299; Grenier, *Tourism and Identity in Scotland*, 52.
140. Mackie and Finlay, *Complete Scotland* (1933), 36.
141. MacKinnon, *How to See Skye* (1937), 12.
142. MacKinnon, *How to See Skye* (1937), 12.
143. Hill, *Footsteps of Dr Johnson* (1890), 181.
144. The knot of ribbons worn by Jacobite supporters, to distinguish them from the black cockades worn by Hanoverian supporters.
145. Morton, *In Search of Scotland* (1931 [1929]), 188–93.
146. *Black's Ireland* (1877), 269–70, quoting H. Dutton, *A Statistical and Agricultural Survey of Galway* (Dublin, 1824), 258.
147. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), 239.
148. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), 239.
149. Quotations from Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 53; other examples in Jordan, *Black's Ireland* (1900), 205; Lang, *Black's Ireland* (1906), 205; Mitton, *Black's Galway, Connemara* (1912), 206; *Murray's Ireland* (1878), 182; Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1902), 230; Ivatts, *Western Highlands (Connemara)* (1869), n.p.; J. O'Mahony and R. Lloyd Praeger, eds, *The Sunny Side of Ireland: How to See It by the Great Southern and Western Railway*, 2nd edn (London, 1903), 235–45.

150. Jackson, *The Two Unions*, 197.
151. James McConnel, *Irish Nationalism, the Cult of the Irish Brigade, and the Great War* (Forthcoming, Liverpool University Press), chapter 5.
152. Jackson, *The two Unions*, 170, 351. For a detailed history of Irish military tradition, see T. Bartlett and K. Jeffrey, ed., *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1997).
153. Jackson, *The Two Unions*, 351.
154. Cooke, *Murray's Ireland* (1906), introduction, 53, 55. The Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 and the Land Acts are not mentioned by name, but the text refers to recent legislative changes in 'the management of local affairs' and 'property'.
155. Stevenson, *Charm of Ireland* (1914), 331–6.
156. Stevenson, *Charm of Ireland* (1914), 331–6.
157. De Bovet, *Tour in Ireland* (1891), 204.
158. Curtis, *One Irish Summer* (1909), 432; Stevenson, *Charm of Ireland* (1914), 346, 353.
159. S. Gwynn, *Ireland in Ten Days* (London, 1935), 7.
160. For the trade wars, see Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (London, 1937), 162–3, 270–71; Morton, *In Search of Ireland* (1932), 229–30.
161. C. Kidd, 'Sentiment, Race and Revival: Scottish Identities in the Aftermath of Enlightenment', in *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, c.1750-c.1850*, ed. L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (Manchester, 1997), 110–26, at 120.
162. Salmon, *Little Guides: Cornwall* (1905), 19–21.
163. Bradley, *Highways and Byways in North Wales* (1898), 257–8; *Black's North Wales* (1883), 53–8.
164. MacCulloch, *Misty Isle of Skye* (1905), 224–5; Pennell and Pennell, *Journey to the Hebrides* (1889), 123.

Conclusion – Atlantic Isles

Atlantic Isles has examined the cultural and political prominence of the west in modern British and Irish history, which flourished in the final decades of the nineteenth century. It is not the intention of this book to suggest that the national context is less important, or that perceptions of continuity across the west flattened national distinctiveness – there is a wealth of scholarship which demonstrates that distinctive national identities were increasingly assertive in this period. However, this book does suggest that there are new connections to be found, which can only be fully understood by looking across national boundaries and by taking a trans-national approach to the western landscapes of Britain and Ireland.

One such connection was infrastructural, and the first chapter sketched the series of uneven developments in the transport network that made previously remote places more accessible. The multiplying and thickening network of railway lines and coach services connected Paddington station with Cornish coastal sites such as Land's End, the Lizard Peninsula and Tintagel, and Thomas Telford's road to Holyhead marked the expansion of the infrastructure state through north Wales. As the nineteenth century progressed, Telford's road was followed by railway lines that made that region of the west easily accessible from the large towns and cities of mid-land and north-west England. In 1895, the Midland Great Western Railway lines that linked Dublin with Galway and Westport were extended to Clifden and Achill, and between 1897 and 1901 the railway approached Skye as it reached Kyle of Lochalsh and Mallaig, offering a swifter route to the misty isle for those not travelling the whole way on a steamer from MacBrayne's growing fleet. At the same time, an attendant tourism industry became increasingly sophisticated, and the work of publishers, railway and steamboat companies, tourist boards, resort authorities, writers, artists and publicity departments made once remote western landscapes more familiar to readers and travellers alike. It was not just tourists who

travelled westwards, and new connections by road, rail and water were traversed by a multitude of artists, writers, MPs, geologists, historians, islanders, soldiers, police, journalists, self-appointed social investigators and others, many of whom wrote about their experiences and are explored in this book.

These infrastructural and cultural transformations highlighted the ways in which western landscapes differed from the urban-industrial centres of Britain and Ireland at the same moment they became more tightly integrated into the territory of the United Kingdom. As [Chapter 2](#) argued, physical and imaginative accessibility produced a distinctive ‘westward gaze’, which was articulated by those who looked and travelled to the west. The westward gaze typically began from afar, in cities such as Edinburgh or in London railway stations, and the journey westwards described the departure from anglicised areas of the British-Irish Isles. Along the way, border regions such as the Welsh Marches and thresholds in the landscape such as the River Tamar were places where anticipation and excitement grew. Leaving Galway city and entering Connemara or catching a first glimpse of the Cuillin mountains prompted evocative descriptions of the landscape, and as the western edge of the land came closer, the language of travel writing was full of mystery, magic, enchantment and descriptions of delicate and otherworldly conditions such as mist, haze, sunset and darkness. Looking out from mountains and cliff edges over the sea to the western horizon, this was a gaze into the imaginative and the unknown, unlike the imperial associations of the sea more familiar to British historians.

[Chapters 2](#) and [3](#) also argued that gazing westwards across the sea led to more focused but equally imaginative engagements with stories about elusive islands and sunken lands. The broader argument here is that the west was a site of modern enchantment, where the rational and sceptical mind of the geologist and archaeologist was no agent of Weberian disenchantment. Far from demystifying western landscapes and seascapes and dispelling wonder, self-proclaimed scientific researchers re-enchanted traditional folk stories and myths about Tír na nÓg, Hy Brasil, Cante'r Gwaelod and Lyonesse by suggesting that they might be based on a foundation of fact. Furthermore, these chapters demonstrated how stories about sunken lands re-emerged with new salience amid early twentieth-century anxieties about coastal erosion and rising sea levels. In the west, doubt, uncertainty and wonder underpinned a thoroughly modern enchantment, which offered a spiritual antidote to the disenchanting effects of modernity.

The traveller’s search for spiritual renewal and enchantment was part of a broader range of behaviours that, as [Chapter 4](#) explored, shed light

on how the west was a set of places for self-fashioning, where individual identities were performed and inscribed in space. The search for authenticity was at the heart of many of these performances, though it was easier to step away from the beaten track and leave the tourist crowds behind in the mountains of Connemara and Skye, or beyond the railway on the Llŷn Peninsula and the Scilly Isles. Moving through the landscape – whether on foot, by rail, in horse-drawn coaches or in motorcars and motorbuses – offered opportunities for travel writers to distinguish themselves from the crowd, and the historical imagination triggered insights amid the cromlechs of western Cornwall and at Dún Aonghasa and Conwy Castle, which also helped knowledgeable travellers differentiate between themselves and clueless tourists. The upland, mountainous and ragged cliffscapes of the west provided a series of arduous tests for those wishing to display a certain brand of masculinity, but this chapter also demonstrated that the persona of the adventurer-traveller, who faced danger and experienced misadventure, was also adopted by many women. Aside from challenging landscapes and sites of historical significance, interacting with a ‘colourful cast’ of hosts injected travel writing with humour, and travellers displayed their ability to draw out wisdom from old men in conversation, while directing a male gaze towards voiceless young women.

But, as [Chapter 5](#) argued, the westward gaze and its associated performances were also directed back towards home. Introspection accompanied outward journeys, and the renewal that could be achieved in the west grew more urgent in light of the rapid, destabilising, and often bewildering transformations associated with industrial, urban and commercial modernity. In western Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, however, remoteness from industry signified economic deficiency, which revealed a lingering colonial discourse that equated English settlement and capitalist production with progress. In contrast, the Welsh quarrying industry and the infrastructure of water were promoted using the imagery of mountainous landscapes in a region where the rural was unmistakably modern. Modernity, as Marshall Berman reminds us, was full of paradox and contradiction, and the remoteness of the west also became the answer to the moral and physical degeneration caused by urban slums, while the spread of suburban architecture gave new meaning to crofters’ huts, cottages in Cornish fishing villages, and the whitewashed walls and thatched roofs dotting the rural landscape of western Ireland.

The anxieties that accompanied urban-industrial and commercial modernity claimed that the physical and moral health of the nation was deteriorating, which highlighted the importance of the west as a potential source of regeneration for the future. However, western landscapes also explained the deeply historical emergence of the United Kingdom.

As [Chapter 6](#) demonstrated, this began with the geological imagination, which inspired dramatic passages of writing that described the titanic forces that had produced valleys and mountains in the northern and western upland areas of these isles. Geology provided a stratigraphical principle that also had pervasive metaphorical power and informed a layered understanding of historical development. To travel westwards was to walk back in time and tread on the ancient ground that provided the foundation for the modern United Kingdom. The language of geology also shaped contemporary understandings of racial ‘strata’ and ‘bedrock’ races in the west. The Iberian and Celtic layers, having swept westward across Europe, had also left their mark on the modern nation, as ethnologists and travel writers measured skulls and commented on dark features that indicated the ‘great human drift’.

The west, then, could be understood as different in degree rather than in kind, and the political implications of this notion came to the fore during the Home Rule debates. [Chapter 7](#) traced the multinational variety of Britishness that emerged from an understanding of the geological, racial and linguistic differences of the west. These differences could be celebrated as part of a valuable contribution to ‘British’ national character, and teleological stories of war, resistance and struggle followed by mutually beneficial political union were grounded in western locations. In Cornwall, Scotland and Wales, bravery and loyalty were appropriated by the British nation as productive forces for the military and in the Empire. In Ireland, conflict was not confined to the past, and the story of the union inevitably slipped into unresolved political issues that, it was hoped, might soon be settled.

Looking across national borders need not be an approach that remains confined to the Atlantic Isles as defined in this book. Brittany, too, experienced the expansion of the French state when railway lines extended to Quimper (1863), Brest (1865) and Landerneau (1867), and branch lines to Audierne and Pont-l’Abbé brought travellers to the far west.¹ Local roads were repaired and rebuilt, providing important links between rural towns and railway stations.² *Cook’s Handbook for Normandy and Brittany* (1883) claimed its publication was ‘a public necessity’ given the new accessibility of the west, and that all the principal towns were within the reach of the lines constructed by the West of France Railway Company.³ Further extensions followed to Concarneau (1883), Douarnenez (1884), Guilvinec and Saint-Guérolé via Pont-l’Abbé (1907), connecting Brittany’s fishing and canning centres with urban markets, and also bringing tourists westwards.⁴ Even Penmarch and Pointe du Raz, on the far western coastline, were more conveniently accessible, and the guidebooks anticipated that ‘every year will bring large additions to the number of English visitors’.⁵

The transport network is not the only point of comparison, and the westward gaze also shaped travel writing in Brittany. In 1906, Nancy Bell approached the Breton peninsula from Normandy, and this journey was marked by the geological transition from 'gleaming chalk cliffs' to the 'storm-worn granitic rocks' that had been 'tortured into a thousand fantastic shapes' by the wild Atlantic waves.⁶ Beyond Kergonet, near the Breton town of Lorient, Francis Miltoun claimed that the traveller 'leaves pretty much all France behind him', and Breton-speaking Finistère seemed like a landscape 'Welsh and Cornish mixed' to the poet Matilda Betham-Edwards.⁷ Questions about modernity emerged at this Atlantic coastline, too, where the travel writer L. Edna Walter felt that 'tradition' and 'mystery' became more significant than 'progress' and 'proven fact'.⁸ Bell explained that the 'all-potent element of mystery' was heightened by the 'varying effects' of humidity, ocean spray, and the soil, and the rocky headland of the Pointe du Raz, which crumbles into the sea like Land's End, became 'even more entrancingly beautiful' when darkness began to fall and the final tourists left.⁹ The gaze did not end with the land, of course, and out to sea travellers turned their minds towards Kêr Is, King Gradlon's once-spectacular city which reputedly rests under the waves of the Baie de Douarnenez.¹⁰ As stated in the introduction to this book, there is much more research to be done on western places and the connections between them.

The western landscapes of Britain and Ireland have retained their allure for travellers and writers today. In *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage* (1986), Tim Robinson described looking up at Dún Aonghasa from a ledge below the cliffs, in a passage that demonstrates the ever-present power of western landscapes to inspire wonder:

For the cliffs treble in height as they encircle the farther arc of the bay, and the dramatic change of scale projects one's gaze into legendary perspectives. If the setting sun is riding into the bay on the backs of the waves, illuminating the vastness of the opposing precipice in golden detail, while the solemn recession of promontories beyond goes back step by step into rose-petal impalpability on the western horizon, then the setting is definitive: Dún Aonghasa, heavy with centuries, dreams upon a pinnacle of another world.¹¹

For Robinson, this was a world of Celtic myth, 'a wide western province of the human mind' opened by 'primal elements such as light and darkness, the air, the depths of the earth and sea'.¹² Robert Macfarlane also found himself drawn to 'the far north or far west' when he went in search of *The Wild Places* (2007) marked by wooded islands in Scotland and Ireland, hill forts and tumuli in Wales and south-western England,

Hebridean cliffs, and remote refuges of eagles, otters, and snow hares.¹³ More recently, David Gange went by kayak to find the real west, his *Frayed Atlantic Edge* (2019), away from ‘the mists of Celtic twilight’. Instead, he hoped to find a place where ‘the rich worlds of real human beings exceeded ... the hazy types of myth’.¹⁴ In the end, Gange’s romanticism and his sense of enchantment remained intact, strengthened by ‘a story, an emotion or a physical sensation’ that he could connect to ‘every western indentation’ on the map.¹⁵

However, while ‘the pull of magnetic west’ described by Robinson, Macfarlane and Gange is in keeping with many of the writers discussed in this book, significant changes have also taken place since the early twentieth century.¹⁶ The establishment of the Irish Free State (1922) severed the political unity of these isles and removed the west of Ireland as a potential site for the foundation of a pan-insular identity. Despite this, tourism remained a ‘model of cooperative success and a source of dialogue’ after partition, and travel literature also crossed the new border.¹⁷ When H. V. Morton went *In Search of Ireland* (1930), he included both Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in his narrative, and Stephen Gwynn did the same when writing *Ireland in Ten Days* (1935).¹⁸ Likewise, Findlay Muirhead’s *Blue Guides: Great Britain* (1930) was restricted to ‘England, Wales, and Scotland’, leaving Northern Ireland for inclusion alongside the Free State in the *Blue Guides: Ireland* (1932).¹⁹ Soon after the political border was established Stephen Gwynn insisted that Ireland remained ‘virtually grouped into Eastern and Western’, because ‘any eastern county is more like to any other eastern county than to any western’.²⁰ The Irish Free State was, Morton made clear, ‘a foreign country’, and after crossing into the North he ‘seemed to be in England again’, but he also suggested that the border – far from representing a clear distinction between altogether different peoples – ‘has all the elements of the game’, in which those on either side ‘play at being foreigners’.²¹ Nevertheless, the new political reality meant that the west of Ireland could no longer be connected to the idea of a deeply historical United Kingdom.

Discussions about the racial foundations of national identity also began to change in the interwar period. It is true that, despite the rise of Mendelian genetics, physical anthropology and racial typology enjoyed what Paul Rich called a ‘long Victorian sunset’, and remained influential into the 1930s.²² As late as 1939, H. J. Fleure was still writing about the ‘dark deep-set eyes’ and ‘large cheek-bones’ that suggested an Iberian ‘substratum’ in the people of Wales.²³ However, Fleure and many of his contemporaries were increasingly alarmed at the real-world application of race theory in Nazi Germany, where eugenics was built into the regime’s ‘race fitness’ programme. In an article called ‘The Celtic West’ (1940), Fleure accused

British political leaders of ‘helping Nazi racialist propaganda’ through their misuse and misunderstanding of the term ‘race’.²⁴ A few years earlier, in an article for *Eugenics Review* on the subject of the ‘Nordic myth’, Fleure emphasised that ‘race-type is an abstraction, to be used with much reserve’, and he was alarmed at the way in which ‘the apostles of the Nordic Race’ used race theory to ‘glorify some group or other’ and support their ‘political ambition’ and ‘mania for power’, whether it be the descendants of ‘the men of the Mayflower’, the English landed aristocracy or ‘the masters of Germany’.²⁵ In this context, the language of race was increasingly questioned, and Julian Huxley and A. C. Haddon opted instead for the term ‘ethnic group’ in their book *We Europeans* (1935), which anticipated broader changes in the terminology of the social sciences after 1945.²⁶ Discussions of ‘national character’ also seemed too rooted in the Victorian period to be relevant after the Second World War, and the BBC scrapped plans for a radio programme on the topic in 1950.²⁷

In place of nation, the politics of class came to the fore in the interwar period, when the Labour Party formed its first governments in Britain, and after 1945 the British imperial nation became reframed in narrower terms, built instead on the welfare state, national industries and the memory of the Second World War, which became, to use Paul Gilroy’s phrase, Britain’s ‘mythic moment of national becoming’.²⁸ Following the rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism from the 1960s and the process of devolution from the 1990s, the SNP and Plaid Cymru have increasingly adopted civic as opposed to ethnic formulations of nationalism in recent years. After forming in 1925, Plaid Cymru unveiled the triban as its symbol in 1933 – three intersecting green triangles representing the mountains and demonstrating how Welsh political nationalism was grounded in the landscape. In 2006, the party replaced the triban with the yellow Welsh poppy, and dropped ‘Cymru’ from their branding, removing Welsh landscapes and language in an attempt to widen their appeal to voters.²⁹ Civic understandings of Irishness have also grown in the Republic of Ireland and more recently in Northern Ireland, where since the Good Friday Agreement Sinn Féin has increasingly rejected ethnic and sectarian definitions of the nation.³⁰

But, for a time, the making of these isles was a process understood to have much deeper historical roots, which could be explored by looking westwards. For a period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea of the west was particularly influential in Britain and Ireland, in politics as well as in culture, and this is something that can only be understood by looking across conventional, national boundaries and embracing the complexities of Irish-British connections. This approach leads to new insights in modern British and Irish history, revealing that the west was a particularly powerful place of modern enchantment, that

Britishness has existed in varieties that are broader and deeper than historians have recognised, and that these isles have been, and continue to be, Atlantic Isles.

Notes

1. For main lines, see Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 204–6; for branch lines in western districts, see S. Baring-Gould, *A Book of Brittany* (London, 1901), 197.
2. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 204–6.
3. *Cook's Handbook for Normandy and Brittany* (London, 1883), 8, 10.
4. P. Young, *Enacting Brittany: Tourism and Culture in Provincial France* (Ashgate, 2012), 85.
5. *Cook's Normandy and Brittany* (1883), 8, 10.
6. N. Bell, *Picturesque Brittany* (London, 1906), 1–2.
7. F. Miltoin, *Rambles in Brittany* (Boston, 1906), 186; M. Betham-Edwards, *A Year in Western France* (London, 1877), 256; The same comparison is made in H. Blackburn, *Breton Folk: An Artistic Tour in Brittany* (London, 1880), 110.
8. L. E. Walter, *The Fascination of Brittany* (London, 1911), 2.
9. Bell, *Picturesque Brittany* (1906), 2, 134.
10. Travel writers drew on the retellings of the legend published by É. Souvestre in *Le foyer Breton* (Paris, 1844) and H. le Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz* (Paris, 1845).
11. Robinson, *Pilgrimage*, 65–6.
12. Robinson, *Pilgrimage*, 66.
13. R. Macfarlane, *The Wild Places* (London, 2007), 15–16.
14. Gange, *Frayed Atlantic Edge*, 12.
15. Gange, *Frayed Atlantic Edge*, 346.
16. Robinson, *Labyrinth*, 234.
17. See E. Zuelow, “‘Ingredients for Cooperation’: Irish Tourism in North-South Relations, 1924–1998”, *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 10, no. 1 (2006), 17–39, quotations from 17.
18. For Gwynn's schedule, see *Ireland in Ten Days* (1935), 13.
19. F. Muirhead, *The Blue Guides: Ireland* (London, 1932), vii–ix; F. Muirhead (ed.), *The Blue Guides: Great Britain* (London, 1930), v.
20. S. Gwynn, *Ireland* (London, 1924), 52.
21. Morton, *In Search of Ireland* (1932), vii, 230–31.
22. P. Rich, ‘The Long Victorian Sunset: Anthropology, Eugenics and Race in Britain, c.1900–48’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 18, no. 3 (1984), 3–17, at 3, 12–13.
23. Fleure, ‘The Welsh People’ (1939), 265–9.
24. H. J. Fleure, ‘The Celtic West’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 88, no. 4571 (1940), 882–4, at 882.
25. H. J. Fleure, ‘The Nordic Myth: A Critique of Current Racial Theories’, *Eugenics Review* 22 (1930), 117–21, at 117–18.
26. Rich, ‘Long Victorian Sunset’, 13.

27. Mandler, 'Consciousness of Modernity', 137.
28. Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 87–95; Edgerton, *Rise and Fall*.
29. 'Plaid Image Change "A New Start"', BBC News, 24 February 2006, accessed 1 February 2025, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south_west/4744956.stm.
30. Williams, 'Pan-Celticism'; R. Marsden, 'Brexit and the Mythologies of Nationalism: A Warning for Wales', *History and Policy* (2018), accessed 1 February 2025, <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/brexit-and-the-mythologies-of-nationalism-a-warning-for-wales>.

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