

Violence and Disturbances in a Medieval University: The Welsh Students at Oxford, 1282-1485

Violencia y disturbios en la universidad medieval: los estudiantes galeses en Oxford, 1282-1485

Alexandre P. Delin*
Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne

Recibido: 26/06/2014
Aceptado: 05/11/2015

Resumen: This article analyses the acts of violence and disturbances committed at Oxford University by scholars from Wales. Violence in medieval universities was far to be uncommon, especially among the young scholars. However, the Welsh had a poor reputation. If they were part of the kingdom of England, those students were not English and therefore were treated as foreigners in England and also in their native country. It appears that in reality, they were not worse than their fellow English students. What is revealing in their case is that their participation in disturbances sometimes strengthened their sense of national identity and belonging, but paradoxically, somehow reinforced their integration in the university community.

Keywords: Welsh, Wales, Oxford, university, violence, disturbances, identity.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza los hechos violentos y disturbios cometidos y provocados por los estudiantes de Gales en la Universidad de Oxford. No era extraña la violencia en las universidades medievales, especialmente entre los estudiantes más jóvenes pero los galeses eran quienes peor reputación tenían. Siendo parte del reino de Inglaterra, estos estudiantes no eran ingleses y por lo tanto eran tratados como extranjeros en Inglaterra. Parece que, en realidad, no eran peores que sus compañeros ingleses. Lo que se revela en su caso es que su participación en los disturbios a veces fortaleció su sentido de identidad nacional y de pertenencia, y que a la vez, paradójicamente, reforzó su integración en la comunidad universitaria.

Palabras clave: Galeses, Gales, Oxford, Universidad, disturbios, identidad.

This paper is based on my PhD dissertation, the title of which was *The Welsh students at Oxford University, 1282-1485*¹, that is to say from the conquest of the principality of Wales to the arrival of the Tudors on the throne of England.

* apdelin@yahoo.fr

¹ A. Delin, *Les étudiants gallois à l'université d'Oxford, 1282-1485*, PhD Thesis, University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013.

Its purpose was to examine the presence of a non-English group within an English university. To this aim, I was able to create a prosopographical database of 304 individuals². Some of the students entered the university before this date but were still present afterwards; others arrived in Oxford before 1485 and continued their studies beyond this time. The distribution is as follows: 15 for the end of the 13th century, 98 for the 14th century and 191 for the 15th century. In order to facilitate the analysis, I divided the two centuries into eight periods.

Medieval students are famous for misbehaving in their university town and for their propensity for violence. Oxford was not an exception. According to Hastings Rashdall, "*There are historic battlefields on which less blood has been spilt*³". By 1231, the university had already decreed that each student ought to be registered by a master. The purpose was obviously to try to control them. The Welsh seem to have been quite involved in misconduct, and although they represented only a minority at Oxford, they had a bad reputation. In 1429 for example, they were accused, along with Irish and Scottish scholars, of robbery and pillage, as well as burning houses in Cambridge, Kent and Essex. But did they really deserve this reputation? Most importantly, how their presence at Oxford does help our understanding of the medieval university? This work will tend to depict an aspect of the vivid life of the Welsh students in an English university and contribute to our understanding of the interaction between various groups that shaped the university community. The purpose is therefore to examine a minority group, but also to highlight its integration in Oxford. The violence in which the Welsh were involved took part in different contexts and reveals their active participation within the community in which they involved.

Fifty four acts of violence, including robbery, misconduct or disciplinary actions against Welsh students have been recorded between 1282 and 1469. Eight took place at the end of the 13th century, 23 in the 14th century and 23 in the 15th century. The eight cases from the beginning of our period refer to the riot of 1282. What is clear from the sources is that this violence in a university context can be divided into three distinct categories. Firstly, there was a lot of rivalry between Town and Gown. Their relations were strained most of the time. The civic authorities fought with the university over the control of the town of Oxford. Riots were frequent, forcing the king to control the prices of rents, bread or beer sold to students, for example. The

² The Welsh represented about 2 % of the student population at Oxford. A. Delin, *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³ H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, vol. 3, Oxford, 1936, p. 96.

university, which often won the case, was then able to enhance its autonomy, as well as its hegemony over the town. Gradually, the students were only answerable to the university jurisdiction. In 1251, for instance, the chancellor of Oxford was allowed to punish clerks' crimes on behalf of the bishop of Lincoln. By 1395, Oxford University was not really under ecclesiastical jurisdiction anymore. It became self-governing. Secondly, tensions developed within the regional groups which composed the university. This violence can be regarded as an assertion of their identity. Finally, disorder generated by individuals was extremely common at Oxford. In such a context, what was the part played by the Welsh?

Before we analyse the group in its relation to violence and disturbances at Oxford University, it is essential to explain first of all, how it has been possible to undertake this prosopography and to understand the difficulties that have occurred in doing so. The examination has been made easier thanks to Alfred Emden's precious register, which gives information on 14,922 people who spent some time studying at the university⁴. In addition, the articles by Rhys Hays⁵ and Gwilym Usher⁶ were very helpful in making the inventory. Some students were also to be found in Ralph Griffiths' article on the partisans of Owain Glyndŵr at Oxford⁷, in *The Episcopal Register of St David's*⁸ or in *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae*⁹. However, the last two entries do not mention the university that they attended. It is more likely that they studied at Oxford rather than Cambridge. The Welsh mainly went to the former throughout the Middle Ages. The University of Cambridge did not attract many of them. Rhys Hays recorded only 38 Welsh, five of whom were present in the 14th century. Even though it is true that the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 saw many university

⁴ A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 volumes, Oxford, 1957-1959.

⁵ R. W. Hays, "Welsh students at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in the Middle Ages", in *Welsh Historical Review*, iv, 1968-1969, p. 325-355. Rhys Hays made an inventory of 360 students from the origins to 1500.

⁶ G. Usher, "Welsh students at Oxford in the Middle Ages", in *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, vol. 16, 1955, p. 193-198.

⁷ R. A. Griffiths, "Some partisans of Owain Glyndŵr at Oxford", in *BBCS*, vol. 20, 1963, p. 282-292.

⁸ "The Episcopal Register of St David's", (ed.) R. F. Isaacson, *Cymmrodorion Record Series*, 3 volumes, 1917-1920. They are Master Philip Craddock, Lewis ap Meredyth (bachelor of law), Master Lewis ap Roppert (bachelor of law), Philip Penkayr (bachelor of law) and Master John Traharn. The latter is in Emden's register. Those names are obviously of Welsh origin.

⁹ *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1300-1541*, 11 volumes, *The Welsh dioceses (Bangor, Llandaff, St Asaph, St Davids)*, (ed) B. Jones, IHR., London, 1965. Master Llywellyn de Brechonia is without doubt Welsh.

records being burnt, only three left traces of their presence between that year and the end of the 14th century, and two before that period. Furthermore, we know that only one out of 200 students at Cambridge was from Wales. Alfred Emden gave a supplementary list of names, which indicates that, although there is no evidence that they were at Oxford, "it is fair to assume that a substantial portion pursued at least part of their academical studies at Oxford¹⁰."

The first problem that we encounter is the recognition of a Welshman when there is no mention of his place of origin¹¹, which sometimes happens. Rhys Hays also highlighted this difficulty¹². In the computerization of Emden's register directed by Trevor Aston in 1976, 198 Welsh are recorded. Nevertheless, he wrote in a footnote: "In this paragraph I have brought into reckoning a few persons as Irish and more as Welsh on the basis of their names even though they were not so classified in the computerization¹³." Unfortunately, he does not give the exact number. It is also important to bear in mind that the sources are English, and therefore, the names are often anglicised. For instance, Matthew de Englefeld, bishop of Bangor (1328-1357), is known in Wales as Madog ap Iowerth, Richard Caunton as Richard ap Gwilym, and John Trevaure, bishop of Saint Asaph (1395-1410), is Ieuan ap Llywelyn ap Ieuf ap Awr. This last comment raises the question of the number of the true natives in comparison with the English settlers. Nearly two thirds of the students have a name which gives no doubt about their Welsh origin. Other names are possibly anglicised. One may suppose that in the group there is a relative mix in favour of the Welsh natives.

The second problem lies with homonyms. It is clear that we cannot confound Richard Penebrok, Commissary for the Abbot of Evesham in 1393, with Richard Penbroke, Abbot of the same abbey in 1461. On the contrary, it seems very difficult to assert whether John More, bachelor of civil law and

¹⁰ *BRUO*. III, p. 2143. The students are David ap Blethyn, Matthew de Englefeld, Ithel ap Robert, Llywelyn ap Madog ab Elis, Alexander of Monmouth, Walter Paderne, John Rees and John Toppan. Lewis ap Howel of Aber is "allowed to remain archdeacon without being ordained deacon or priest, in order to enable him to proceed to the degree of DCL...", *Calendar of Entries in Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, 1362-1404*, (eds.) W. H. Bliss, C. Johnson, iv, London, 1902, p. 192. Once again, there is no mention of the university. It is very likely to be Oxford for the reason explained above.

¹¹ There are four Welsh dioceses (Bangor, Saint Asaph, Saint David's and Llandaff). A small part of the diocese of Hereford is in Wales. The country is also divided between the Principality, directly ruled by the king of England or his eldest son from 1282, and the Marches, controlled by the Marcher Lords.

¹² R. W. Hays, *Op. cit.*, p. 326.

¹³ T. H. Aston, "Oxford's Medieval Alumni", in *Past and Present*, 74, 1977, p. 22.

principal of Saint Cuthbert Hall in 1453, is the same person as John Moure, licentiate of civil law and rector of Tydd Saint Mary Lines (Cambridgeshire) in 1454. The problem is even more apparent between John Lewis, principal of Broadgates Hall in 1464 and John Lewis, bachelor of civil and canon laws, who was ordained deacon in 1476. However, this only affects eleven students¹⁴. In addition, three scholars appear twice in Emden's register. John Morgan, Dominican friar at Oxford convent, and ordained acolyte in Oseney Abbey on 18th April 1473 and who was a doctor of divinity by 1481, is probably Morgan John, also ordained acolyte in this abbey on the same date. Richard Cauton, rector of Bridell in 1413, is Richard ap Gwilym, and when we refer to the episcopal register of Saint David's, it appears that the latter is rector of the same parish in 1404. Edmund de Caermarthen, Dominican friar is the same man as Edmund de Kermerdyn or Kaermerdyn¹⁵.

As a matter of fact, it is easily understandable that the various spellings of Welsh surnames such as those seen in Caermarthen, Kermerdyn or even Gryfyth, Greffyth, Gruffuth as in the modern version of Griffiths, can make the prosopographical process challenging¹⁶.

This list is therefore neither perfect nor exhaustive. Nevertheless, it allows for an analysis of the Welsh group at Oxford.

Welsh students played a role in the violent events which occurred between Town and Gown, although it is not always easy to judge from the archives their full implication. Those conflicts were often caused by young students frequenting the numerous taverns of Oxford. Thus, on the 10th February 1355, a brawl broke out between scholars and townspeople in the tavern "Swyndlestock" on Saint Scholastica's day. Two students, Walter Spryngeheuse, rector of Cricket Saint Thomas (Somerset) and Roger de Chesterfield, rector of Ipplepen (Devon), who found the wine they were served not to their liking, threw it in the face of the owner, who by chance was the bailiff of Oxford. This row escalated into a pitched battle between the students and the citizens, which lasted days, forcing the king to intervene by sending troops. At the end, 62 students were killed, among them, Roger of Wales who was seriously wounded, fighting for his life¹⁷. Unlike their unfortunate fellow countryman, Lewis de Charlton and his brother Humphrey were involved

¹⁴ John Aphenwell, John Brecon, Duppa, William Gryfyth, John Lewis, John More, Richard Rowdale, Richard ap John, Thomas Philip, John White (1401) and John White (1481).

¹⁵ *BRUO*. II, p. 1040.

¹⁶ The spelling of names given by Emden has been kept for this study.

¹⁷ *Survey of the Antiquities of the city of Oxford composed in 1661-1666 by Anthony Wood*, i, (ed.) A. Clark, OHS., xv, 1889, p. 461.

in the settlement of peace and played an important role in the defence of the university's liberties against the town¹⁸. A poem celebrated the alliance between the Welsh and the English scholars, which is quite rare and for that reason deserves to be highlighted.¹⁹ The Welsh identity of our students differentiated them from the rest of their fellow scholars, which could sometimes lead to animosity between members of the university community.

Until 1274, the students at Oxford would gather in nations, as was the case in the University of Paris. The Oxford students were divided into two nations. The Northern nation included all the scholars from the north of the river Trent, whereas the Southern one represented the rest of the English, as well as the Irish and the Welsh; therefore this was sometimes called the Irish nation. Unlike Paris, Oxford was not a cosmopolitan university. The number of continental scholars was very small, and as a result, the need to keep such structures was not necessary. Although those nations had no longer official existence at the end of the 13th century, they continued to last *de facto*. The antipathy between the Welsh and English which existed in Wales was also to be found in Oxford. On 29th April 1285, a riot occurred in High Street near the church of Saint Mary's between the students from the North of England and those from the Welsh Marches. The registers of the university mention the following names: Robert de Byseleye, William Fyleveche, Henry de Mortimer, Philip Mostrewyke, Brian de Pedewardyn, Edmund de Seham, Benedict de Sutton and Reginal Lodelowe. The latter was accused of killing a student with a sword. Those scholars opposed 13 English students. In 1343, the university decided that one proctor from each side of the river Trent should be appointed in order to prevent violence among students from different regions. Resentment towards the Welsh had for consequences to consolidate their identity, to grow their self-consciousness and perhaps also develop a feeling of unfairness, of which they might have thought they were the target. In the riot which broke out in 1388 at the instigation of the Northerners, it seems that the Welsh were the victims. This riot grew out of all proportion and Thomas de Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, had to reach Oxford to put an end to days of violence. The King's records referred to an individual called John Kirkeby, who with his friends' help, ran down the streets shouting: "War,

¹⁸ *BRUO*. I, p. 390-391.

¹⁹ "Non sic pertranseas, o regni gloria,
Nobiscum maneat divina memoria,
In te nunc Anglici figunt tentoria,
Exultant Wallici tua Victoria". *Planctus Universitatis*, in *Collectanea*, iii., (ed.) M. Burrows, H. Fumeaux, OHS., 1896, p. 165.

war, war, sle, sle, sle, the Walshe dogges and her whelps, and hosoketh out of his hous, he shal be dede²⁰." Some Welsh scholars were murdered, others critically wounded. The assailants forced the Welshmen to kneel in front of them and kiss the ground, as well as the town gates. The Welsh clerk Adam of Usk was, according to him, one of the people responsible for the expulsion of the agitators. He proudly wrote in his chronicles:

"During the first year the Northerners were completely driven out of the university, their expulsion being widely attributed to the compiler of this present work", portraying himself as the leader of the Welsh, he added: "the compiler of this present work was indicted as the chief instigator and leader of the Welshmen²¹."

Indeed, his name emerges from the records of the King's Bench. He told us more about the events of the following year:

"During the second year, however, in what was for them an evil hour, they returned to Oxford gathering together at night to prevent us by force from leaving our lodgings, they spent two days attacking us in a variety of ways, sacking and looting the lodgings of our compatriots, and putting some of them to death. But on the third day our countrymen, considerably reinforced by support from Merton Hall, forced then shamefully to abandon the public thoroughfares which, for those two days, they had occupied, like castles and to flee back to their own lodgings²²."

Those types of conflicts undoubtedly consolidated a sort of national cohesion amongst the Welsh. It certainly enhanced their sense of pride. The year 1388 was definitely not good for the Welsh at Oxford. A royal pardon granted in October to an individual named John Wyche, reveals that he might have used offensive words towards the Welsh students during a lecture²³. Without drawing any conclusion, one might think from the last example that an anti-Welsh feeling could have been strong within the community. However, rivalry between halls sometimes shows signs of obvious tensions. In this case, the Welsh could also fight each other. In 1446, for example, a dispute erupted between Broadgates Hall and Pauline Hall, both of them provided accommodation for some Welsh students²⁴. Students would move their trouble and quarrel from home to Oxford.

²⁰ CPR, 1391-1396, p. 605-606.

²¹ *Chronicon of Adam of Usk*, (ed.) Ch. GivenWilson, Oxford, 1997, p. 15.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³ CPR, 1385-1389, p. 517.

²⁴ *Munimenta Academica: Documents illustrative of Academical Life and Studies at Oxford*, (ed.) H. Anstey, Roll Series, vol. 2, 1868, p. 552-554.

Another aspect of disturbances is delinquency. Except from riots and homicides, misconduct within the university is spread out over the years 1352 to 1466. From 1430 to 1466, 13 of our students were involved either in vandalism or in some types of behaviour which disturbed the peace. We have 109 students for whom the date of first appearance at Oxford is to be found in that particular period; consequently, they represent 12 % of the total of the Welsh student population at the time. Besides, from 1432 to 1456, 10 students out of 77 are recorded, that is to say nearly 13 %²⁵. It has to be added that this period is the one with the most significant number of Welsh scholars, due probably to the increasing amount of available archives. It appears that the Welsh had a similar behaviour to those of the English clerks. In 1352 at Oxford, Robert de Uske from the diocese of Llandaff and other students were charged by the prior of Saint Frideswide's with breaking into his house at Garsington, stealing his goods and assaulting his servants²⁶. In 1406, master Lewis Cardygan was arrested for having smashed the door and the windows of Saint Leonard's church near Waterstocke (Oxfordshire), as well as having sacked the presbytery. He was still in jail in 1408 but received a royal pardon on the 19th December 1412²⁷. Some were of course wrongly accused. In July 1398, for instance, Geoffrey ap Jevan was indicted for the robbery of the church of Aylburton in Gloucestershire but managed to establish his innocence, as he was in fact in Oxford at the time of the misdeed²⁸. Oxford jails detained other Welsh scholars. In 1458 David ap Thomas from Gower Peninsula near Swansea swore to keep the peace and to inform the university authorities about any plot against them, of which he might have been aware. He also promised not to try to release a man called Richard Lude (Lloyd?) from prison²⁹. John Morgan had to pay a fine of 10 shillings and was incarcerated, as he had threatened the chancellor's commissary with a sword. He was released on the 17th September 1459 for good behaviour. John Meredyth, who stood surety for a defendant before the chancellor's commissary in 1466, was fined two shillings for carrying a stick. David Stevyns and others students from Eagle Hall attacked the junior proctor by night in July 1443³⁰. Stevyns continued with his misconduct and was imprisoned for two

²⁵ A. Delin, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.

²⁶ *CPR*. 1350-1354, p. 386.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 1408-1413, p. 460-461.

²⁸ *BRUO*. II, p. 755.

²⁹ *Munimenta Academica: Documents illustrative of Academical Life and Studies at Oxford*, (ed.) H. Anstey, Roll Series, vol. 2, 1868, p. 680.

³⁰ *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis 1434-1469*, (ed.) H. E. Salter, vol. 1, OHS., 1932, p. 81.

days in Oxford castle in February 1444 because he had verbally threatened the chancellor of the university and carried arms³¹. Even though the status of a student (*clericus*) did not allow them to carry arms, it was, however not unusual, as illustrated by the examples above, to see scholars often disobeying the rules. It is easy to understand how this wild comportment can take place among a young and unsteady male population. In fact, the titles and diplomas of those involved in violent acts are, except for one, never mentioned, due to the fact that they are most likely undergraduates. It should be borne in mind that it was not uncommon in the Middle Ages to enter university at a relatively young age (around 14 years old). Furthermore, Oxford taverns were places in which young scholars could get carried away, as previously seen on Saint Scholastica's day. It is the case of Richard Rowdales and Hugh Thomas who seemed to have attacked an ironmonger in a tavern called "The Bullstake" on Botley Road in 1430. Moreover, prostitution, which is mainly an urban phenomenon, was wildly spread in Oxford. Lewis Ydern had to swear before the chancellor in 1444 to renounce his activities as a procurer³².

Their admission to the university could often only be accepted if they gave strong guarantees for their good behaviour³³ and in the 15th century, the University of Oxford took measures in order to contain students' violence and to prevent the most boisterous from disturbing the tranquillity of the *studium generale*. The students became increasingly under the supervision of the principal of the hall to which they belonged. Besides, the royal statute of 1420 required that a scholar should appear before the chancellor or his commissary within a month of his arrival at Oxford in order to take a statutory oath. So did Hugh de Monmouth on the 6th March 1446, a certain Morgen on the 31st January 1447, Thomas Roos in August 1448 and John ap Rice in 1452. Welshmen also helped and supported each other and misbehaviour could bring close solidarity amongst them. Walter Pennarth and Geoffrey Trevenant stood surety in 1443 for the future good behaviour of a compatriot called *Favianus* (Floyd?) Conway³⁴. On the 10th December 1467 and on the 14th January 1468, Morgan Philip defended Thomas Jenkyn, another Welshman living in Oxford, but who does not seem to have been studying at the university³⁵. Conversely, connections were made with townsfolk

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90-91.

³² *Munimenta Academica: Documents illustrative of Academical Life and Studies at Oxford*, (ed.) H. Anstey, Roll Series, vol. 2, 1868, p. 539.

³³ *Rotuli Parliamentorum 1278-1503*, vol. 4. Record Commission, London, 1783, p. 386.

³⁴ *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis 1434-1469*, (ed.) H. E. Salter, vol. 1, OHS., 1932, p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 274, 277.

and Oxford citizens could in this way stand surety for scholars. For instance, a woman from the parish of Saint Ebbe's did it for Morgan Floyd in 1453. Of course, the Welsh were not always on the wrong side. In 1444, William Griffith, David Stevyns, David Kyffyn and William Conwhay assured the chancellor that the English student Hugh Sadler, apparently inclined to violence and fornication, would amend his behaviour³⁶. In July 1386, David ap Jevan ap Howel and Griffin ap Howel, both from the diocese of Saint David's, were excommunicated by Robert Rygge, chancellor of the university, on the bishop of Hereford's demand, John Trevenant, a former Welsh student. Unfortunately, we do not know his reasons for doing so. It could have been for heresy, as the bishop seemed very keen to eradicate it from the Church.

A few Welsh students were summoned to the court of the chancellor of the university, who looked after all aspects of students' life. David de Hendoz was called to justify his debts on the 11th June 1381. In some cases, if an individual kept breaking the peace, the chancellor could take the ultimate step, that is to say expulsion. Thomas Roos was banished from Oxford on the 5th December 1450, the same day as Hugh Brekenok who had committed an offence in the church of Saint Mary's. In 1448 Morgan Philip was also expelled, the reason being his insolence and quarrelsome nature. He won the support of Henry VI who demanded his readmission³⁷. David Dewy was banished on the 27 February 1437 for breach of the peace. William ap Yevan, who had sworn to keep the peace before the chancellor and his two proctors on the 10th April 1459, was eventually evicted on the 5th May, as he had insulted the sheriff of Oxford and had refused to appear before the town authorities. Sometimes, the sources are not clear and the reasons for expulsion are vague. Robert Greffyth was banished on the 18th April 1461 because of "his evil deeds and enormities³⁸." Another Morgan was expelled from the university on the same date but the reason was not mentioned. In 1469 a Cistercian monk called Maurice was also banished according to Emden's register, although I could not find any record of it in the chancellor's register. Finally, William Castel witnessed violence at Oriel College and helped with the expulsion of the agitators in February 1456³⁹. It seems, nevertheless, that the feeling of injustice grew stronger amongst the Welsh. For example, a former

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 539.

³⁷ *Munimenta Academica: Documents illustrative of Academical Life and Studies at Oxford*, (ed.) H. Anstey, Roll Series, vol. 1, 1868, p. 264-266.

³⁸ BRUO., I, p. 817; *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis 1434-1469*, (ed.) H. E. Salter, vol. 2, OHS., 1932, p. 36.

³⁹ BRUO., I, p. 369.

student, whose name was John, wrote a letter in French to the chancellor in order to request, as it seems, the readmission of the “estudiants des Gales”. He complained about the way the Welsh scholars were treated at Oxford. The document, which can be found in the Public Record Office, is much damaged and it is, therefore, very difficult to assert whether the author is Welsh or not⁴⁰. The letter is also not dated. The handwriting suggests that it might have been written around the beginning of the 15th century.

Those disturbances were sometimes part of a larger context. The University of Oxford was not safe from the political crises which troubled the kingdom of England at the time, such as the War of the Roses. As a result, the university became the scene of fights between Yorkists and Lancastrians. A fair number of students gathered in armed bands fighting with one another⁴¹. Welsh students were not to be outdone. This also demonstrates their integration within the *regnum Anglorum*. According to John Vincent, the landlord of the tavern “The Cardinal’s hat”, two sons of Roger Vaughan, Hugh Brekenok and a tutor (*creditor*) called William stole a horse on the 8th February 1461⁴². It is very likely that they are the sons of Sir Roger Vaughan from the parish of Llanfihangel Cwm Du in Powys. He fought at the battle of Mortimer’s Cross in the army of Edward, duke of York, the future Edward IV. The Lancastrians were defeated. A few days later, the news reached Oxford and the Vaughan (Vawghane) brothers, along with a significant number of scholars (*aliis multis*⁴³), decided to join Edward. Roger Vaughan had many children, so it is not easy to identify them with precision. Welsh society was divided during this period of turmoil, and so were the Welsh students. Hywel Swardwal, the father of the student Ieuan ap Hywel ap Swardwal composed an elegy in honour of the Yorkist, William Herbert, earl of Pembroke⁴⁴. While at Oxford, Ieuan ap Rhydderch ap Ieuan Llwyd wrote poems in which he supported the Lancastrians⁴⁵.

Since most of the registers recording homicides have been preserved, we can make an attempt to find out how far the Welsh got involved in such crimes. Carl Hammer wrote: “Welshmen and Irishmen, generally clerks, seem to have been involved regularly in homicides although, lacking precise

⁴⁰ Public Record Office, Petitions, SC/8/182/9060. This letter could be linked to the revolt of Owain Glyndŵr at the beginning of the 15th century.

⁴¹ P. Kibre, *Scholarly privileges in the Middle Ages*, London, 1961, p. 317.

⁴² *Registrum Cancellarii Oxoniensis 1434-1469*, (ed.) H. E. Salter, vol. 2, OHS., 1932, p. 43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ M. Stephens, *The new companion to the literature of Wales*, Cardiff, 1998.

⁴⁵ *Gwaith Ieuan ap Rhydderch*, (ed) D. Iesty, Aberystwyth, 2003, p. 50-53.

information on their numbers, we cannot say whether their contemporary reputation for violent behaviour was, in fact, deserved⁴⁶." Was this reputation well deserved indeed? He analysed the proportion of crimes committed by students and concluded: "Their share does not seem to exceed one-third of the total for the entire century, and in about two fifths at most of all incidents involving clerks in any capacity, either as assailants or victims, does one clerk kill another (20 out of 52)⁴⁷". In fact, in 11 cases out of the 36 homicides committed in the town of Oxford in the 1340's, only one scholar could be the assailant⁴⁸. No Welsh appear in those sources. However, out of the 29 murders committed between 1297 and 1322, 13 were the act of a student⁴⁹. Out of those 13 crimes, four were committed by Welshmen. Lewis de North Wales and David ap Oweyn fought against three students from the North of England at the Smith Gate in 1303 and killed William de Roule, a scholar from the diocese of Durham who had come to rescue his compatriots. Philip Lewelyn murdered another student on the evening of the 24th July 1305. Crimes between Welshmen could also happen. Elias de Montegomorry fled Oxford on the 7th December 1301 after he had fatally wounded another Welshman in his lodging in the parish of Saint Peter in the East. At first glance, in comparison with the percentage of Welsh students at Oxford, this can seem significant. However, those four crimes occurred in a short period (1301-1305). Six Welshmen committed a crime out of the 98 students recorded in the 14th century, but none happened between 1306 and 1386. John Gunderhumber stabbed a man on the 29th January 1386. Elyas Pannour slew the chancellor's apparitor at Magpie Lane on the 4th April 1389. Moreover, the Welsh who were murdered were more numerous than the ones who killed. Six of them were victims of homicide between 1282 and 1356. Gervase, son of John Maddak, was murdered in August 1300. On the 24th February, after the feast of Saint Peter in Cathedra, John de Snowdoun and David Voyl were shot by arrows fired by Hugh Mymmes and died in the parish of Saint Edward. Benedict Vaughan was killed in Saint John Street in 1338. Matthew de Kentheleys was found dead in 1313, although the cause of death remains obscure. Towards the end of the 14th century, two students were killed. Those were Geoffrey Hawlame in 1385 and John Coneway, murdered the following year by a scribe named Thomas Catour. His accomplice was the Welsh student,

⁴⁶ C. I. Hammer, "Patterns and homicide in a Medieval University town: Fourteenth Century Oxford", in *Past and Present*, 78-81, 1978, p. 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁹ *Records of Medieval Oxford*, (ed.) H. E. Salter, Oxford, 1912.

Hugh Hulkyn. The 15th century is quieter since no Welshman committed a crime, and only one, Thomas Cardyff, was found dead, killed by an arrow, “as he was passing through the street by the house of William Taylor⁵⁰.” His murderer was Richard Adyson, a student from Yorkshire⁵¹. It is not surprising to notice a fall in crime in the 15th century. University rules then became stricter. In 1420, students were only allowed to reside in halls or colleges and no longer in private lodgings, so that the university authorities could keep an eye on the most undisciplined.

The Welsh students participated in misconduct, bad behaviour and violent acts while studying at Oxford University. Those disturbances were part of the existing tension in the university, whether it was between regional groups or between Town and Gown. The Welshmen were to be found in the disputes and rows which were happening at the time. They also perpetrated individual criminal offenses like English clerks did. Even though at the end of the 13th century and beginning of the 14th century, the Welsh were engaged in violence and wild behaviour, becoming a visible minority within the university community, it is safe to say that they were not worse than their fellow students. Regarding murders, most of the Welsh students displayed a model of good conduct in the 15th century. Of course, not all of them did, and their action sometimes sent them straight to jail or caused their expulsion from the university. It is apparent from the sources that through certain acts of violence and disturbances, they asserted their integration in an English environment, while paradoxically reinforcing their sense of national identity. At the dawn of the 15th century, the revolt of Owain Glyndŵr, a gentleman from North Wales, cast suspicion on them. Their national pride amplified and a feeling of freedom for Wales and its people blew across Oxford, spreading fear among the population. This significant event in Welsh history will deserve a study on its own.

Bibliography

- Aston, T. H. “Oxford’s Medieval Alumni”. *Past and Present*, 74 (1977): 3-40.
 Bliss W. H. and C. Johnson (eds.). *Calendar of Entries in Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters, 1362-1404*. London: HMSO, 1902.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

- Delin, A. *Les étudiants gallois à l'université d'Oxford, 1282-1485*. PhD Thesis, University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013.
- Emden, A. B. *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 volumes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957-1959.
- Griffiths, R. A. "Some partisans of Owain Glyndŵr at Oxford". *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 20 (1963): 282-292.
- Hammer, C. I. "Patterns and homicide in a Medieval University town: Fourteenth Century Oxford". *Past and Present*, 78-81 (1978): 3-23.
- Hays, R. W. "Welsh students at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in the Middle Ages". *Welsh Historical Review*, iv (1968-1969): 325-355.
- Iesty, D. (ed.). *Gwaith Ieuan ap Rhydderch*. Aberystwyth, 2003.
- Kibre, P. *Scholarly privileges in the Middle Ages*. London, 1961.
- Rashdall, H. *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*. vol. 3, Oxford, 1936.
- Stephens, M. *The new companion to the literature of Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998.
- Usher, G. "Welsh students at Oxford in the Middle Ages". *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 16, (1955):193-198.