

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> Swansea University
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 - English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> Father knows Lloyd George. Now so do thousands of others: expanding theatre audiences and enriching history in post-devolution Wales
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

D.J. Britton's play about Lloyd George, aimed at post-devolution Wales, created a bottom-up artistic and commercial model that involved potential audiences in the creative process. The play toured remote rural locations as well as towns, achieving unusually high audiences for a drama of this kind. Its reach was further extended through a BBC broadcast on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lloyd George's birth. The play stimulated considerable public discussion of national history. A direct impact was a £20,000 grant from the Arts Council of Wales to pursue the creative and audience development processes with another play. The innovative methodologies also attracted international attention at Singapore Management University's Arts/Business Conference for practitioners, arts organisations and businesses.

### 2. Underpinning research

*The Wizard, the Goat and the Man Who Won the War* involved a collaboration between D.J. Britton (Associate Professor, Swansea since 2006) and BAFTA-winning actor Richard Elfyn. The project's aims were twofold: a) to investigate the practicalities of small-scale independent touring theatre in Wales without the large establishment costs associated with major theatre institutions, and b) to engage a post-devolution Welsh public in the political, cultural and philosophical issues raised by the Lloyd George legacy. The resulting mono-drama was short-listed for three categories in the Wales Theatre Awards 2013 (best script, best performance, best production), which is remarkable given the scale and budget of the project. Critics were united in their acclaim for the production, noting its performative strengths and its historical engagement. They remarked on the use of dramatic technique to dig deep, writing that the script "*does what theatre can do and journalism cannot. That is to depict complexity and paradox*". Another critic highlighted its use of "*beautiful and succinct metaphors and allegories*" in achieving this. A third remarked: "*It doesn't whitewash the faults, it simply lets us see them through the eyes of the man who doesn't himself see them as failings*" (for references see 'Sample Reviews' in section 3 below).

The play's compositional methodology dramatised historical biography using concepts from Australian 'total theatre'. The development process tested moments and incidents selected from literature-based research against various performance techniques, including song, dance, courtroom drama, stand-up comedy, the Music Hall, and political oratory. Over time, these were shaped into a coherent psychological analysis of an outstanding but flawed political figure. The completed production saw Lloyd George on the occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, escaping to the beach at Antibes for an hour of 'real time', while a past of triumphs and disasters, and the prospect of future delights, flood his memories.

Progressive live audience trials were a crucial part of Britton's "ground-up" approach, to encourage public involvement and cultural ownership while the project was still in development, so that by the time it reached fruition there would be a pre-seeded community expectation. This aspect of audience development has created considerable interest among arts funders and other theatre practitioners (see section 4). The project began with exploratory research at Lloyd George's former home in Llanystumdwy (now the National Writers' Centre for Wales), from which a prototype performance was crafted. A preliminary reading was given at the Lloyd George Museum, Llanystumdwy, in 2008, to an audience including residents of Lloyd George's home village, members of his family and those with a close interest in his life (e.g. the current and former directors of the museum). Public discussion which followed the reading provided personal, factual and interpretative insights, giving impetus to changes of direction in the developing dramatisation. A pilot full performance was given at the Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea in 2010. Again, discussion followed and the audience filled in feedback sheets expressing views on both the artistic and practical/marketing aspects of the work. The play attracted Arts Council of Wales project funding of £4,600 towards the first of two national tours, which began in November 2011 at

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Swansea University's Taliesin Arts Centre. Wales Arts International provided £1,495 part-funding of the Singapore performance. Singapore Management University contributed match-funding.

Collaborating organisations included the National Writers' Centre, Ty Newydd, Llanystumdwy, Gwynedd (Literature Wales); the Lloyd George Museum, Llanystumdwy, (Gwynedd County Council); Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea; National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; and Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea.

### 3. References to the research

The research is a piece of creative writing / drama production, therefore the standard research reference format has been adapted. Swansea researchers in **bold**.

- **Britton, D J** (2011) *The Wizard, the Goat and the Man Who Won the War*. 65 minute drama.
- Public performance record:
  - 1) Trial reading, Lloyd George Museum, Llanystumdwy November 2008.
  - 2) Prototype performance, Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea November 2010.
  - 3) First national tour, November 2011 – March 2012. Premiere performance at Taliesin Arts Centre, Swansea, then venues throughout Wales concluding at the Richard Burton Theatre, Cardiff.
  - 4) Second tour, starting at the Mochta Riady Auditorium Singapore and including return performances at Theatr Clywd (one week); Galeri Bangor and Taliesin Swansea.
  - 5) BBC Wales broadcast, 5pm January 12 2013.
- Lottery Grant (2/11/2011), Arts Council of Wales, recipients **D J Britton** and Richard Elfyn £4,600 <http://www.lottery.culture.gov.uk/GrantDetails.aspx?ID=20100814&DBID=AW>
- **Britton, D J**, Wales Arts International Grant No: 20120526 - The Wizard in Singapore (£1495) November 2012.
- **Britton D J** (2012) Wizard Goat or Hero? Discussion of the project with extracts from script. <http://www.swanseareview.com/2012/djbritton.html>
- Sample **reviews** at Morris K, ed., *Theatre Wales* website archive 2011/2012, including performances at the Richard Burton Theatre, Cardiff, reviewed by Chelsey Gillard, 6/3 2012; at Clwyd Theatr Cymru, reviewed by Victor Hallett, 24/11/2011; at Taliesin Theatre, Swansea, reviewed by Michael Kelligan, 11/11/2011; at Aberystwyth Arts Centre, reviewed by Adam Somerset, 18/11/2011. <http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/index.asp>. Also in *Theatre Wales*: 'Acclaimed Lloyd George play to get national tour' [www.theatre-wales.co.uk/news/newsdetail.asp?newsID=4131](http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/news/newsdetail.asp?newsID=4131)

### 4. Details of the impact

[References in square brackets refer to corroborating references given in section 5.]

**Beneficiaries** of this research are:

- The creative industries and arts practitioners in Wales. They have used the play to reach new audiences and/or used the methodology in considering new creative and business models for theatre.
- The Welsh communities who helped develop the play and those who watched it. They have been stimulated and moved by powerful theatre into discussion of a major national figure and his legacy.
- The National Library of Wales and the Lloyd George museum, which have included material from the project in their archives, further enhancing public knowledge.

**Creative industries and business:** The project has changed attitudes among theatre practitioners and arts funders by conclusively demonstrating that small-scale touring theatre can succeed commercially as well as artistically, provided the integrity of the product is linked throughout its development to an understanding of its potential audience. A direct impact is the founding of a new theatre company, Theatr Cadair, which was invited to apply for, and was awarded, an Arts Council of Wales Theatre Production Development Grant of £20,000, to pursue Britton's methodology and to research material for a new drama, *Windsongs of the Blessed Bay*, to be drawn from the

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international Welsh diaspora [C1]. Such grants are awarded only to a small number of projects, for activities that are genuinely exploratory and innovative, and which provide a clearly focussed explanation as to how the work will be developed with its potential audience in mind. Theatr Cadair takes its name from Cader Idris, the mountain above the Tal-y-Llyn valley, where *The Wizard* played in a remote former chapel to an audience of over 50 (the first theatrical event there in living memory). The company has also been commissioned (May 2013) by the Rhys Davies Trust, with support from National Theatre Wales, to develop a biographical play about Rhys Davies and Anna Kavan. The Manager for Performing Arts at the Arts Council of Wales comments: *"I have followed the progress of this creative project from experimentation through to production. Its high level of artistic achievement has been recognised both by critics and by fellow professionals. As an example of well-researched small-scale theatre with big ambitions, the theatre industry can learn much from it. This progressive and collaborative research-into-performance experimentation has considerable possibilities for future theatre developments. Similarly, Britton's achievement ... in taking difficult subject matter and marketing it effectively to a broad audience across the nation is something of a breakthrough in itself; the techniques used ... could well open doors for other ventures which set out to ... bring serious research-based material to a popular audience."* [C2] Another respected industry figure, Head of Creative Learning at Sherman Cymru Theatre, Cardiff, comments: *"Britton's play impressed me artistically because of its unusual and innovative synthesis of theatrical approaches. This apparently free-wheeling but in fact highly-focussed style was much-discussed by practitioners and may prove highly influential on those attempting to create richly imagistic theatre on a small scale"*. [C3]

**Public Engagement – reaching new audiences:** Box-office returns show around 4,500 theatre-goers have paid to see the play in Wales, both in districts where live theatre performances are rare or virtually unknown, and in major urban venues where it played to effectively full houses. This figure is two to three times the norm, and should be understood in the context of the geographically dispersed Welsh population and the wider cultural market: sales of English-language literary fiction published in Wales do not often exceed 1,200. For comparison, a play reaching a similar proportion of the population in England would have been seen by some 74,000 people. The Welsh live audience may be multiplied many times over by the numbers tuning in to the BBC broadcast of the play (June 2013 RAJAR figures give BBC Wales audience reach as 499,000) [C4]. The play has also been performed in Singapore, and has been invited (Sept 2013) to the Vieille Theatre in Antibes, where the action is set. It will tour again in 2014 to mark the anniversary of the Great War and BBC Wales plans to re-broadcast the play in 2016 to mark the centenary of Lloyd George becoming Prime Minister. The production was widely covered in the Press, on television and radio, and was extensively reviewed. Reviews on the *Theatre Wales* website alone have attracted well over 4,000 hits, and interviews and clips on the internet continue to be viewed. The play was praised by renowned Singapore playwright Robert Yeo: *"During the Q-and-A a young Singaporean woman said ... what impressed her most was the moving portrait of a very human figure attempting to justify his actions ... She spoke for most in the audience ... This production reminds us of the value of the solo drama form, just how good it can be."* [C5]

**Influencing community memory/enriching Welsh cultural life:** As shown by the testimony of those who have been affected, the play has enhanced understanding and stimulated debate in a variety of Welsh communities, and has spanned the traditional divide between north and south Wales and between Welsh-speaking and English-speaking audiences. The Head of International Development for *Literature Wales* comments as follows: *"In Gwynedd, there are strong feelings among older people about Lloyd George, both for and against. By focussing on the whole man (his excesses and frailties as well as his achievements), the play helped people to re-examine their feelings about him and to talk about what they felt. For younger audiences, it opened doors to the complexities of combining living both a public and a private life. These effects became apparent in the post-show discussions, and in the conversations in the community at large after the performances"* [C6]. The play had a comparable effect when performed in Merthyr Tydfil. A viewer comments: *"Merthyr, like the other mid Glamorgan valleys, is historically a Labour stronghold and not best-disposed towards Lloyd George whose contentious attitude to the miners, and to the English-speaking culture of the coalfield, overshadowed his contribution to the development of social welfare. The play, superbly performed by Richard Elfyn, was followed by a discussion which*

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*demonstrated how powerfully this dramatic treatment had challenged the audience's opinions about the man and his contribution to Welsh and British life. The play itself was very well received and the issues it presented both engaged the audience and stimulated strong debate."*

Further audience feedback corroborates this. One drama teacher remarked: "Our students were thoroughly engaged with the narrative and style ... A valuable theatre experience, it without doubt informed their approach to their own work back at school ... The play changed the way our students related to Lloyd George, a figure they barely knew before attending the performance. By seeing him played as a real human being, and by seeing the political and personal challenges he had to face, they were better able to understand his role as man and statesman." National Theatre Wales's young critics' on-line forum called the play "truly inspirational" [C7]. In North Wales, one member of the audience commented: "You bring in so much historical fact in a fascinating way. I am delighted your play will spread the word about Lloyd George". Another viewer was moved to reveal a previously unrecorded biographical fact, and a powerful family memory: "I've just returned home from your play at Theatre Clwyd ... My father knew Lloyd George, I can sing the song. He grew up in a cottage in the grounds of Bryn Awelon, Criccieth ... When my Taid was seriously ill in the early 1930s, Lloyd George paid to take him to London and for the King's physician to operate on him. Unfortunately my Taid died on Xmas eve. Lloyd George went to tell my Nain the news. He then went into Criccieth and bought my dad a Meccano set and my two aunts a doll each. My surviving aunt still has the dolls ... I won't have a word said against him. For all his faults I think he was a man who cared. I think that came across." [C8]

The National Library of Wales has placed materials from the play in its Lloyd George collection. The Head of the Political Archive at the National Library described the play as "an outstandingly brilliant piece of work, with amazing historical accuracy", and requested permission on behalf of the National Library to use the play's title for the NLW's major Lloyd George exhibition, opening in October 2013 to coincide with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lloyd George's birth. [C9]

<b>5. Sources to corroborate the impact</b>
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[C1] Arts Council of Wales – March 2013, Theatre Production Development Grant of £20,000 (Application Decision 20120867 'Windsongs of the Blessed Bay')

[C2] Manager for Performing Arts, Arts Council of Wales

[C3] Head of Creative Learning, Sherman Cymru, Cardiff

[C4] BBC listing <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pw4bt>.

[C5] Adjunct Professor in Theatre at Singapore Management University.

[C6] Head of International Development, *Literature Wales* [www.literaturewales.org](http://www.literaturewales.org)

[C7] Young Critics, National Theatre of Wales: [http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/reviews\\_details.asp?reviewID=2743](http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/reviews_details.asp?reviewID=2743)

[C8] Audience feedback given to Britton. On the wide community impact of the play, see e.g. *Western Mail* (11/11/11): 'New Lloyd George drama tours Wales, by Karen Price: Charismatic war-time politician David Lloyd George is put in the spotlight in a new touring drama'.

[www.walesonline.co.uk/showbiz-and-lifestyle/showbiz/2011/11/11/new-lloyd-george-drama-tours-wales-91466-29756277/](http://www.walesonline.co.uk/showbiz-and-lifestyle/showbiz/2011/11/11/new-lloyd-george-drama-tours-wales-91466-29756277/); *South Wales Evening Post* November 12, 2011: 'Absorbing Tale of Statesman' [www.thisissouthwales.co.uk/Absorbing-tale-statesman/story-13828657-detail/story.html](http://www.thisissouthwales.co.uk/Absorbing-tale-statesman/story-13828657-detail/story.html);

BBC Radio Wales Arts Show, Wednesday November 9, 2011 (7pm); BBC Radio Wales Roy Noble Show, November 8 (2pm); BBC Wales Arts Online, 'The Wizard the Goat and the Man Who Won the War' November 8 2011.

[www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/walesarts/2011/11/the\\_wizard\\_the\\_goat\\_and\\_the\\_man\\_who\\_won\\_the\\_war.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/walesarts/2011/11/the_wizard_the_goat_and_the_man_who_won_the_war.html). On the Singapore response see the BBC Blog <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/wales/posts/lloyd-george-hit-play-returns-to-tour-wales-via-singapore>.

[C9] Head of the Political Archive, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.