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## **DEVELOPING WREXHAM'S SENSE OF PLACE**

**Prepared for Wrexham County and Borough  
Tourism Department**

**by**

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## **Introduction**

Sense of Place is an initiative developed by Visit Wales (previously Wales Tourist Board) to help support the development and enhancement of Wales's cultural offer and identity in order to effectively compete in the international tourism marketplace for 'cultural visitors' and to fulfil and exceed visitors expectations of engaging with Wales's unique culture during their visit.

## **Background**

On 28 November Angharad Wynne, Special Advisor Sense of Place, led a Sense of Place workshop as part of Wrexham Business Week. Individuals representing a broad cross section of business interests within the tourism sector attended and contributed enthusiastically to the workshop. The aim of this workshop was to generate key 'Sense of Place' information and ideas relating specifically to Wrexham so that a stronger tourism brand identity can be developed that harnesses the rich cultural product that the region offers. This will be used to support forthcoming marketing and brand development work being undertaken by Wrexham County Borough Council Economic Development Department, and to inform the tourism agenda and strategy for the region.

## **Workshop Aims**

The aims of the workshop were

- To raise awareness about Sense of Place, what it is and why it is important to and effective at developing business and promoting Wales
- To reinforce understanding of the wider context of marketing destinations to the lucrative 'cultural visitor' and how differentiation is key to success in this competitive marketplace.
- To involve the local specialists in the process of developing a 'Sense of Place' palette for their region and enable them to input their views on their regions' specific offer, culture, history, traditions, food and cultural attractions.

- To demonstrate how including cultural aspects in the promotion of a destination strengthens the identity and the appeal, and helps to build a stronger brand identity for the region.
- To discover a richer array of cultural images, icons and activities that will help differentiate this region and build a clearer more complete and more effective destination identity for it.

### **Overview of results**

The overwhelming insight gained from undertaking this workshop was the wealth of cultural and tourism interest Wrexham and its surrounding area has to offer. Currently the region's identity is tied to Wrexham town itself and the broader tourism offer is not clear because of this. While it is important for Wrexham to continue promoting the attributes of its urban area, by developing a strong Sense of Place and clearer branding, each experience can be wrapped around with a stronger identity that is core to Wrexham's tourism 'offer' and relates to its cultural as well as lifestyle attributes ranging from food to arts, wildlife and landscape to history.

The region has its very own cultural history and identity which differentiates it from neighbouring areas. The region should use this rich palate of cultural attributes to build a strong brand image for the Wrexham region that target visitors will find appealing. It is important, however, to remember that visitors are no respecters of County boundaries and some of the key themes eg historical figures and their stories will take visitors on a journey further afield – this is where close liaison with other counties in the Borderlands partnership becomes meaningful.

Wrexham shares a great deal of cultural context with other similar post industrial rural and border areas of the United Kingdom – castles, rugged and beautiful scenery, good walking, accessibility from major population conurbations, industrial heritage and historic attractions. The aim of Sense of Place is to discover the unique mix of specific things that sets the area apart,

which defines it as different and of particular interest, thus making it a destination of choice rather than one of many offering the visitor similar things. The Welsh language, folklore, specific local and regional history and heroes, genealogical connections and food and drink are just some of the things that can help to differentiate a region and build a strong Sense of Place and destination identity.

This work is timely. In 2008 North Wales will be promoting itself as the dramatic outdoors and working to lure the thousands of additional visitors due to visit Liverpool for its City of Culture year. Additionally, the area is currently receiving a good deal of national attention as the result of the commercial success of the Froncysyllte Male Voice Choir, and with a Hollywood film in the early stages of development, it is likely that the surrounding area will enjoy the kind of increased profile and resulting tourism traffic that other places such as Cornwall and the Yorkshire Dales have had in the wake of popular films.

Similarly, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct has secured the 2008 UK slot to go forward as the nomination for UNESCO World Heritage status and this is likely to raise the profile of the area significantly and provide a potential iconic branding image.

The results of the workshops indicate clearly that there is so much more to recommend this region, and that in fact, the branding is currently 'incomplete'.

## Workshop results in details

Following the modular sections of Sense of Place – Wales and its People, Welsh language and Culture, Buildings, Food and Drink, Arts and Creativity and the Great Outdoors, the group brainstormed elements of the area under these title headings which defined it and which may prove useful in a tourism context. The results were as follows:

<b>People and local history</b>	<b>Welsh Language &amp; Culture</b>	<b>Buildings</b>	<b>Food and Drink</b>	<b>Creativity and Arts</b>	<b>Great outdoors</b>
Yale family	Growth in Welsh Medium Schools	Large country houses	Beer – Wrexham Lager now owned by Bass	Male Voice Choirs	Oldest Oak tree at Pontfadog
Hanging Judge Jeffries (Acton Park)	14% of the population speak Welsh	Mining and industrial villages	Brewing tradition due to the particular water quality of the area	Harp players	Historic Yew tree
Ceiriog	Owain Glyndwr	Pubs – Wrexham had over 1000 at one time!	Plassey Brewery – ‘put the ale in Wales’	Arts festival in Wrexham in May	Gresford Church is over 1000 years old
Eos	Border region and history	Red brick and Terracotta	Woodlands Ice Cream	Galleries- Yale, Arts Centre in the Library	Alyn Waters Country Park
Wilkinson Brothers: Ironmongers inc cannon	Eos	Wynnstay Arms (where Welsh FA was founded)	Cheese	Stiwt Theatre	National collection of Iris at Erddig – also hydrangeas
Yorks of Erddig	Ceiriog	Tiles from Roman times at Holt	Worthenbury Wine	William Aston Hall	Chirk and Erddig parklands

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Owain Glyndwr	Male Voice Choirs	Ruabon brick factory	Honey producers	Churches as venues for arts	Chirk snowdrop walks
Walcyn Wyns	Welsh Chapel Services	Wrexham well (Pentrefelin) detailed terracotta	Penylan Pork	The Little Theatre and Grove Park venues and theatrical companies	Industrially reclaimed environments – Ceiriog Valley “little piece of heaven on earth” Lloyd George in a speech to Parliament to overturn the decision to dam the valley
Middletons of Chirk	Harp playing – through Welsh Medium Schools	Marford Hill – round houses crossed rifles. Flemish architect built them – he was captured during the Napoleonic Wars	Soft fruit and market gardening in the Holt area	Worthenbury Music Festival in July	Circular walks from the villages
Billy Meredith	Eisteddfodau	Chirk and Holt Castles	Britain’s best butcher at Holt – Vernon’s	Bellevue Park live music every Friday in the summer	Cycling trails
Wrexham museum – collection of football archives	Welsh knot	Chirk Castle – continuously lived in since it was built	Woodlands and hedges food initiative	Yale central station – modern music	Equestrian trails

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Thomas Telford	Colloquialism: I'll do that 'just now'	Holt – pentagonal towers are very rare	Pantycochan Hall – first restaurant in UK to serve Chicken in a basket!	North Wales Guitar Festival	Pheasant shooting and fishing in the Ceiriog Valley
Capability Brown		Grosvenor blue brick on the border	Erddig Victorian banquet	Erddig Ceilidh	Canal
Family of Hoseley Hall and Rossett Hall (builder became Lord Mayor of London)		Medieval Churches	Apple Festival at Erddig 1 <sup>st</sup> weekend in October	Open air concerts Erddig	Mountainbiking centre at Llandegla (Denbighshire)
John Lowe – Channel Tunnel		Erddig Hall – cup and saucer hydraulic pump	Pheasant shooting and fishing in Ceiriog Valley	Home of Llyr Williams, classical pianist	Horse carriage driving – National Qual Championships at Erddig
Alistair Williams – Encyclopaedia of Wrexham		Rossett Mill – painted by Turner	Game and country pursuits UK headquarters in Rossett	Silver Bands	Fenns Moss – National Nature reserve and wetlands
Babe (Car Pendine Sands – designer / driver?)		Only thatched roof school in Wales. Penley	North Wales onion championship – National Veg Society	Sculpture in the community	Special newts?



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Mary Doray Faulkner		Rainbow Centre – Penley Polish Hospital	Kelloggs and Cadburys	Basketmakers in Bangor on Dee	Nature of waterways
Holt Castle – Edward 1 <sup>st</sup> – lots of ghosts		Gresford mining disaster memorial	Erddig Food Festival	Tradition of cabinet making and wood carving in the Ceiriog Valley.	Marford quarry has a diversity of butterflies and insects
Brymbo Man					
King Arthur – round table at Wrexham		Yale’s tomb, St Giles Church	Farmers markets		Otters on the River Alun
Brian Hughes-composer		Statue of Queen Victoria, Bellevue Park (prototype)	Covered market in Wrexham – butcher’s market – 150 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of its charter		Badgers near the Canal
Market going tradition		St Giles’ Church – replical tower in Yale USA			Red Kites at the top end of the Ceiriog Valley
Chapel going		Hexagonal foundry building at Bursham			
Steel and Mining industries		Pontcysyllte Aqueduct			
Welsh Fusileers old base		Chirk Aqueduct			

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Rhos – Chapel		Hoffman Kiln at Minera Quarry			
Growth in Welsh medium schools		Roundhouse in Ruabon – put in the evening to dry out			
Borderland community		Althrey Hall (Bangor on Dee) – Tudor / earlier building important mural of wedding (now in private ownership) Bangor on Dee Monastery – earliest Christian building in the UK?			
Processions		St Giles Church Tower, Bells of Gresford, Overton Yew Tree – 3 of the 7 wonders of Wales			
Closure periods – industrial holidays		Barn at Erddig brought in from Whitchurch, it was a place of worship for a secret sect.			

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	Gorsedd circles and Eisteddfodau	Offa's Dyke			
	Powys Eisteddfod – Ceiriog Valley	Watt's Dyke			
	Sheepdog trials in Dyffryn Ceiriog-championship at Llanarmon	Old bridge crossing at river Dee / Holt and Bangor			
	Male Voice Choirs	Holt Caves			
	Harp playing – through Welsh Medium schools	Minera Caverns – Roman Lead mines			

## **PEOPLE AND LOCAL HISTORY**

People relate to people. We are infinitely fascinated by stories about other human beings, about how they lived, what they did, how they did it, who they loved, why and how they died. Following such a story or a history is often the starting point or the inspiration for visiting a particular region: following a specific historical character's story, the story of a particular community, one's own personal story in the case of genealogy, or indeed the story of a particular culture, folk hero or mythological figure ( we need look no further than King Arthur to understand how such figures can become potent catalysts for visits to sites and areas associated with a character's history).

Furthermore, people provide the best access-point for understanding a period of history, providing detail, colour and a sense of perspective that the broad sweep of historical fact can not. This is why the characters of an area are so important, and make such powerful advocates and storytellers for the region, able to engage the visitor and draw them along on a journey of discovery.

Many of the individuals on the list above have other – often stronger associations elsewhere in Wales, or their links with the Wrexham area are momentary – they were born here, went to school here, but did not necessarily achieve that for which they are known in the region. Those listed below are more firmly bonded to the region, or, their significance and therefore their usefulness for being well known names or characters with a wide appeal and also able to provide an inroad into a significant period in the region's history, makes them worthy of our focus in terms of developing a Sense of Place palette for Wrexham.

There are a number of key periods in the regions' history that these individuals relate to – prehistory, the period of the industrial revolution and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Interestingly, other than Owain Glyndwr (who has better links to other parts of Wales) there are no obvious characters relating to the region who speak of the medieval period. This is not to say that none could be found with further research, but it may demonstrate that this is not one of the

most interesting or relevant periods in the case of the cultural development of Wrexham, and that in fact, prehistory, the industrial revolution and the early Twentieth Century are.

### **Brymbo Man**

Brymbo Man is one of Wrexham's earlier inhabitants. Discovered in August 1958 by local workmen digging a pipe trench in Brymbo, the incomplete remains of a Bronze Age man were discovered in a stone lined box. Alongside the remains were a small earthenware pot and a flint knife which helped to date the skeleton to about 1600BC.

**Brymbo Man might make a great 'cartoon' character for children to help develop family trails in the area giving access to some of the other pre-Christian sites and shrines via paths and walkways. Alternatively, or indeed additionally, he could provide a great access point to the area's pre-historic sites, providing a theme or a way of describing this area during that period through his eyes – in the footsteps of Brymbo Man etc.**

### **Hanging Judge Jeffreys**

George Jeffreys, 1st Baron Jeffreys of Wem, (May 15, 1645 – April 18, 1689), better known as "*The Hanging Judge*", became notorious during the reign of King James II, rising to the position of Lord Chancellor (and serving as Lord High Steward in certain instances).

Jeffreys was born at the family estate of Acton Hall, Wrexham, the sixth son of John and Margaret Jeffreys. He was educated at Shrewsbury School; St Paul's School, London and Westminster School, London. He became an undergraduate at Cambridge University, leaving after one year and he embarked on a legal career in 1668. In 1667, he had married Sarah Neesham, by whom he had seven children before her death in 1678.

Shortly afterwards, he worked his way into the favour of the Duke of York, younger brother of Charles II of England, who would succeed Charles as James II of England. This development in Jeffreys's career indicates his

ambition, since he had been brought up a strict Protestant, and James was a Catholic. Jeffreys was knighted in 1677 and by 1680 had become chief justice of Chester. Charles II created him a baronet in 1681, and two years later, he was Chief Justice of the King's Bench and a member of the Privy Council. His subsequent career showed how willing he was to subordinate his impartiality as a judge to his political ambitions.

One of several trials which showed how far Jeffreys was prepared to go in order to curry royal favour was that of Algernon Sidney, who had been implicated in the Rye House Plot and was convicted on the flimsiest evidence and executed. James II, following his accession to the throne, elevated Jeffreys to the peerage as Baron Jeffreys of Wem. He appears to have suffered at the time from kidney stones, which probably inflamed his already violent temper.

His reputation as a judge became even more unsavory following the sentences he handed out to followers of the Duke of Monmouth, an episode that concluded the Monmouth Rebellion, which became known as the "Bloody Assizes." Jeffries held his assizes in the Great Hall of Taunton Castle, the current home of the Somerset County Museum. James named him Lord Chancellor in 1685, and he held this position until James was deposed in 1688. Recognizing what the new reign would mean for him, he attempted to flee the country but was captured. He died, of the kidney disease from which he had some time suffered, in protective custody in the Tower of London. He was originally buried in the Chapel Royal of Saint Peter ad Vincula, Tower of London then moved to St Mary Aldermanbury in 1692. His eldest son, John, succeeded him.

**Judge George Jeffries makes an interesting 'rogue' character for the Wrexham area. His ties with the political and royal circles of his era, make him a valuable character in terms of placing Wrexham in a wider context, and again, he could make a great character to develop for first person interpretation, even though most of the 'episodes' for which he is remembered happened in other areas of the UK.**

## **Yale Family**

Elihu Yale is possibly Wrexham's most famous son. Born in Massachusetts on 5 April 1649, he was the second son of David Yale, a wealthy Boston Merchant. They traced their family roots back to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century when they settled in Plas yn Ial in Llanarmon yn Ial near Wrexham. They adopted the surname Yale from the name Ial.

Elihu and his family returned to Plas Grono Wrexham during his youth due to the discrimination against non-Puritans that David Yale experienced in America. Soon after they moved to London where David again took up a career as a merchant.

Following a classical education, Elihu joined his father's company before entering the service of the East India Company as a clerk. Through his work he travelled extensively including India where he stayed for 27 years.

He married a wealthy widow, Catherine Hynmer who brought him a fortune. She had four children of her own from her previous marriage and Elihu and she went on to have a further 4 children, three daughters and a son who died in infancy. The marriage was to last only nine years. Elihu returned to Britain in 1699 and he spent the remainder of his life between Plas Grono and his home in London, where he died in 1721. He was buried in St Giles Churchyard, Wrexham. The inscription on his tomb which he wrote reads:

*Born in America, in Europe bred  
In Africa travell'd and in Asia wed  
Where long he liv'd and thriv'd; In London dead  
Much good, some ill, he did; so hope all's even  
And that his soul thro' mercy's gone to Heaven  
You that survive and read this tale, take care  
For this most certain exit to prepare  
where blest in peace, the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in silent dust.*

Elihu Yale was a benefactor to Yale University, Connecticut and so the University was named after him. A replica of Wrexham church tower was built on Yale Campus to commemorate their benefactor.

**Yale is a well known name, and clearly he is a popular character for American visitors. Potentially more could be done to use him as a gateway character. He could well prove to be useful in terms of first person interpretations as an ambassador for the history of Wrexham and the surrounding area during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and of its links with the commercial world.**

### **John Wilkinson**

(Pioneer of the iron and steel making industry)

Born in 1728 in Clifton in Cumbria, Wilkinson became known as Iron Mad John Wilkinson, due to his interest in iron and its uses.

His father, Isaac Wilkinson, set up a small business in Lancashire making flat iron heaters, which John assisted with. During this time they patented a new type of smoothing iron. John moved to Bilston in Staffordshire where he raised the money to build his own blast furnace. About 1761 he and his younger brother William took over the running of the furnace at Bersham near Wrexham from their father, who had been running it with little success. Under the brothers the business prospered. John went on to buy Brymbo Hall and build two blast furnaces nearby. This was the beginning of what was to become Brymbo Steelworks.

In 1774 John Wilkinson was granted a patent for a new method of boring iron. This revolutionised the production of cannon as it resulted in more accurate weapons. Previously cannon were cast as one piece with the hole up the middle. Wilkinson's method was to cast a solid piece and use his new method of boring to create the hole. Using this method meant there were fewer imperfections in the cannon. Cannon made at Bersham were said to have been used in countries across Europe during the wars at the turn of the century.



Joseph Priestley, the chemist who discovered oxygen, was Wilkinson's brother-in-law. Wilkinson's name is also linked with that of James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine, as cylinders for Watt's engines were made at Bersham. Wilkinson became High Sheriff of Denbighshire. Married twice, in his seventies he had three illegitimate children with his mistress, Ann Lewis; the third child was born when he was 78!

**John Wilkinson is a central character, and therefore also an important access point into the industrial history of this region. Interest in industrial heritage has grown significantly in the last 10 years, and Wrexham is well placed to capitalise upon this. More could be done to promote John Wilkinson's story and create links between him, his activities and the rest of the region's industrial heritage and characters of the period, possibly leading to some kind of industrial heritage trail linking different sites in the region.**

### **Yorke of Erddig**

The Yorke family have a very long history at Erddig, Philip Yorke. 1743-1804 was the first of the family to live there having inherited the estate from his uncle John Meller. He was the author of the Royal Tribes of Wales which brought together his genealogical and antiquarian research. There is a room in Erddig which features the coats of arms of the chief North Wales families. His namesake Philip Yorke was the last to live on the estate, leaving in 1873 when he gave it into the care of the National Trust.

**The eccentricities of this family, especially the two named above could provide Erddig in particular with a rich vein for themed guides, first person interpretation and so forth which would provide an interesting and delightful access point into some of the regions' social history.**

### **Billy Meredith**

William Henry Meredith (July 30, 1874 – April 19, 1958), better known as Billy Meredith, is perhaps one of the most famous names in British football. He was the game's first superstar, and achieved 48 caps for Wales. 22 of these were

gained while playing for Manchester City, 26 while playing for Manchester United. His favored position was right wing.

Meredith was born in 1874 in Black Park, Chirk, Wales and started work at Black Park colliery as a pit pony driver. After spells at Chirk and Northwich Victoria, Billy joined Manchester City in October 1894 for an unknown fee. He made his debut against Newcastle in the same month, when City lost 5-4, but the following week Meredith would take the first step to becoming a legend in Manchester by scoring two goals against Newton Heath - who would later become Manchester United - in the first Manchester derby. He was loved by the City fans and would draw huge crowds for any public event he attended. Meredith's career with City was distinct in two parts. His first time was tarnished by allegations of bribery and in 1904 he was hit with an 18 month ban from playing for City.

In May 1906, he moved to Manchester United, made his debut on January 1, 1907 in a 1-0 win against Aston Villa, and quickly became a firm favourite amongst the fans there. In 1921 he returned to City where he continued to play with his customary toothpick in his mouth until the age of 47. In 1924 he played for City in the FA Cup where he was still able to score against Brighton. His last match was against Newcastle in the semi-finals at the age of 49 years and 245 days, making him the oldest player ever to play in the FA Cup. In total, Billy appeared 390 times for Man City and scored 150 goals and won 1 F.A. Cup with City. Meredith played 335 games for Manchester United, scoring 36 goals, and won 2 Football League Championships, 1 F.A. Cup and 2 F.A. Charity Shields while with them.

Billy Meredith died in Withington, Manchester, England in 1958 at the age of 83. Billy is honoured in the Hall of Fame at the City of Manchester Stadium.

**Billy is a great Character to act as a gateway to the wealth of football history in the region including the founding of the Welsh FA at the Wynnstay Arms Hotel and the Welsh Football Collection at Wrexham County and Borough Museum.**

## **CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE OF NOTE**

### **Brian Hughes**

Brian Hughes was born in Rhosllannerchrugog, Wrexham in 1938. His vocal and choral music is very dramatic and is particularly accessible to the listener. He receives frequent commissions from various choirs and groups of musicians throughout Wales and England. His experience of choral training during his period as conductor of the Alun School Singers, Mold, and as the chorus master of the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, has given him a particular expertise in choral writing. Nevertheless, he does have works for large orchestra to his name - Strata and Janus as well as chamber music such as Quando for clarinet and Pieces for Miriam for flute.

### **Llyr Williams**

Llyr Williams the outstanding international concert pianist was born in Pentrebychan near Wrexham in 1976. He read music at Queen's College, Oxford, graduating in 1998 with a first class alpha degree. He went on to take up a postgraduate scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music where he won every prize and award. At the beginning of 2005 Llyr was awarded the MIDEM Classique 'Outstanding Young Artist Award in partnership with the International Artist Managers' Association' and in the same year he made his Proms debut with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jiri Belohlavek, opened the Queen's Hall series at the Edinburgh Festival and appeared with the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields at the Barbican's Mostly Mozart Festival. Future plans include his USA debut in 2007 and recitals in Germany, Luxembourg and France.

## **FOLKLORE**

There is at least one haunted bridge in North-East Wales - the medieval sandstone bridge which spans the Dee at Holt, on the Wales-England border. The haunting recalls a despicable murder which took place soon after the bridge was built.

Madog ap Gruffudd of Dinas Brân, Llangollen, had died, leaving two young sons with no trustees. John, Earl Warren, and Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, were appointed as guardians but the cruel lords plotted to gain for themselves the wealth the boys would inherit on their coming of age. One night they took the boys on horseback from Chester to Dinas Brân and, as they crossed the bridge, they halted and gently took down from their mounts their sleeping wards. Then, as one, they heaved the helpless boys over the parapets into the freezing waters of the river beneath. The boys screamed in terror, begging for rescue as their sodden clothes dragged them relentlessly down. But Warren and Mortimer stood and watched and waited until they were drowned, smiling with satisfaction the while.

It is said those pitiful cries are still heard at dead of night echoing from beneath the bridge so that the cruel deed should not be forgotten.

### **LIFE IN THE REGION TODAY**

On the basis that 'our everyday lives are someone else's adventure, a key part of developing the Sense of Place of a region is understanding what aspects of the everyday lives of the area's inhabitants may be interesting or seem unusual or 'foreign' and therefore culturally intriguing to visitors. The other important part of this equation is to provide curious visitors with access points by which they can experience or at least learn more about these aspects of our everyday lives. The following is a summary of key elements of the lifestyle of people in the Wrexham area today that visitors might find interesting.

#### **Market Going**

There is a rich tradition of produce markets in the region dating from the dark ages. Indeed, Wrexham made its money as a centre of market trading and still hosts the largest market in North Wales every Monday. Markets are also regularly held in various towns in the region.

**It would be useful to add a list of Markets and their dates to the Wrexham tourism website.**

## **Chapel Nonconformist Worship**

The tradition of nonconformist chapel going is still strong in many areas of this region, nowhere more perhaps than in Rhosllanerchrugog.

The Commissioners in their 1847 report on the State of Education in Wales, described the communities of Rhosymedre and Rhosllanerchrugog as the most immoral and ignorant in north Wales. Yet that same year 1,595 children from the parish of Ruabon attended a Sunday school attached to a local church or chapel.

Nonconformists saw the report as a challenge to build more chapels and to be more active in the community. By 1900 there were over 20 chapels and churches belonging to at least five different denominations around Rhosllanerchrugog.

The chapels were strong supporters of the Temperance Movement. The movement condemned alcohol and used social events to convince people to take 'the pledge'. They opened cocoa rooms in Wrexham and Overton as alternatives to the pub. Local teachers often complained that children were tempted to miss school to attend the many processions and tea parties organised by temperance societies such as the Band of Hope and the Rechabites.

The Welsh Religious Revival of 1904 also left a major impact on Rhosllanerchrugog. The famous bardic line *Beibl a Rhaw i Bobl y Rhos* (a Bible and a Spade - i.e. the mining implement - for the people of Rhos) reflect the importance of both coal-mining and the chapels on the village's culture and heritage.

The influence of the - predominantly Welsh language - churches and chapels impacted greatly on the linguistic and cultural profile of the area, and until the early 1980s chapel-going was significantly higher in Rhos than in most other parts of Wales or the UK. One result of this is that although only nine miles

from the English border and surrounded by English-speaking villages, Welsh is still spoken as a community language in Rhosllanerchrugog.

Edward Hubbard describes Rhosllanerchrugog in his Buildings of Clwyd noting its “great concentration of chapels”. In the 1905 Royal Commission report on places of worship there were twenty-one: Welsh Wesleyan; English and Welsh Calvinistic Methodist; Primitive Methodist; English and Welsh Congregationalist; and English, Welsh and Scots Baptist. The population at the time according to the 1901 census was 9,414.

One of these Chapel buildings of particular note is Penuel Chapel (Capel Penuel), a two storey Welsh chapel built in 1856-9 with a brick facade installed during renovations in 1856-91. The chapel was the starting point site of R.B. Jones's campaign in the village during the religious revival in 1904-1905. One of the chapel's ministers was Lewis Valentine the famous Welsh pastor, author and political activist.

**It is important that visitors to the area have information on how and when they can visit these chapels and other churches in the region – whether to see the buildings or to participate in a service. It would be useful to create a database of contacts for these religious establishments in addition to bodies such as the Church Tourism Network who could provide regular up-dates and help facilitate visits if necessary.**

### **Steel and Mining Industries**

While many of these industries are no longer active in the area, they are undeniably the bedrock of the social and cultural history of the region in the past three centuries. Interest in industrial heritage is on the increase and it is important that visitors centres such as Minera lead mines that are a part of this history are well marketed to visitors

### **Eisteddfodau**

As in most places in Wales, Eisteddfodau whether at local, regional, county or National level are a regular feature of the social and cultural calendar, and just as much of a feature as the Gorsedd stones are in the local landscape. **It**

**would be useful to list some of the local and regional Eisteddfodau on events listings aimed at visitors with some explanation of the tradition.**

### **Sheepdog Trials**

The rural lifestyle of much of the region is perhaps best exemplified in the Wrexham area by sheepdog trials. The area is renowned for such trials and these events can provide visitors with an entertaining and authentic inroad into local life in the area. **Listings of such events along with county shows etc should be added to events databases aimed towards visitors to the area.**

### **Male Voice Choirs**

There are numerous mixed and male-voice choirs in the area, most famously by now the Froncysyllte Male Voice Choir of course, though arguably they are based in Denbighshire. Perhaps the most well known choir in the Wrexham area is the Rhos Male Voice Choir. This Choir has been in existence for over a hundred years, performed in many of the Worlds great opera houses and achieved numerous successes in major competitions.

Information on accessing MV Choir rehearsals is still amongst the top three questions asked by visitors on the Visit Wales website, so again, **it's worth contacting some of the local choirs to understand if they're happy to receive visitors to their rehearsals and publicise a list of times, dates and locations to visitors.**

## WELSH LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Being a borderland area, this region, for many provides their first experience of being in Wales – of the different and unique culture they have come in search for, and the Welsh language is a key component in this, clearly marking this region as different in nature from a few miles down the road in England. It is important therefore, that the Welsh language forms a prominent yet appropriate part of the Sense of Place mix for Wrexham.

Some 14% of the population in the Wrexham region speak Welsh, and it is growing every year, thanks in no small part to the growth and popularity of Welsh Medium Schools. **It is important that visitors wishing to hear the language being spoken are guided to places where they might hear the language – whether that's the local pub, the market, a chapel, a particular town or event. It is also important that people in the tourism industry in the region know the story of the Welsh language in the region, and equip themselves to engage and promote the language at whatever level they feel comfortable doing so – whether at the basic level of welcoming visitors with 'Croeso' – Welcome, Bore Da – good Morning and prynhawn da or nos da – good afternoon or goodnight and perhaps translating menus, certain portions of their website of business information. Much of this small scale translation work can be done by using the Welsh Language Board's free translation service – see their website [www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk](http://www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk).**

Certain communities within the Wrexham area have a particular dialect-Rhosllannerchrigog is one such example. The village has always had a reputation, especially amongst other Welsh speaking communities, for its' unique dialect of the Welsh language. The main example, is a word that has become synonymous with the village: "Nene", meaning "that". It is so highly associated with the village, that the local, monthly paper is simply titled "Nene". The word "Nene" is pronounced as "nair-nair", and is sometimes used in association with another unique word, "Ene" (air-nair), meaning "there". As in the question: "Be 'di nene ene?" Which translates as: "What's that there?"



There are of course, many other examples. However, "nene" and "ene", are probably the most famous of them all. Such dialectical intrigues are interesting for visitors and local people alike and it would be interesting to promote these, alongside key Welsh words and phrases on such things as menus, beer mats, tent cards in cafes and restaurants etc. as a way of engaging visitors in the language.

It is estimated that some 21% of hotel occupants in Wales are Welsh people. Add to that the fact that about a third of the population are Welsh speakers, and a statistic is formed that about 7% of tourism in Wales is attributable to Welsh speaking Welsh people.

This 7% are often interested in the cultural heroes of the Welsh language, and it would be foolish to ignore the opportunity here, especially as Wrexham has two such interesting characters in Eos and Ceiriog to promote, however we should not assume that these characters are only of interest to Welsh speakers, their lives, work and contribution to Welsh culture make them interesting characters to promote.

### **Ceiriog**

John Ceiriog Hughes (September 25, 1832 - April 23, 1887), was a Welsh poet and well-known collector of Welsh folk tunes. Sometimes referred to as the 'Robert Burns of Wales'. *Ceiriog* was born at *Penybryn* farm overlooking the village of Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, in the Ceiriog Valley.

Through his desire to restore simplicity of diction and emotional sincerity, he did for Welsh poetry what Wordsworth and Coleridge did for English poetry. He became famous winning a series of prizes for his poems in the 1850's. His first collection of poetry was published in 1860 and is called *Oriau'r Hwyr* ("Evening Hours"). As well as writing poetry he wrote many light hearted lyrics which he adapted to old Welsh tunes, or the original music of various composers. Many of his songs were written to folk airs. Ceiriog Hughes' song lyrics include *Dafydd y Garreg Wen* ("David of the White Rock") and *Clychau Aberdyfi* ("The Bells of Aberdyfi"). He also wrote the Welsh words to the song,

"God Bless the Prince of Wales". The Welsh version of the song "The Ash Grove" is putatively attributed to Ceiriog Hughes.

His fascination with Welsh folk music led to an investigation of the history of the music and particularly the harpists who would often accompany them. This led to a grand project to publish four volumes of Welsh airs, of which only the first volume actually made it to press in 1863: *Cant O Ganeuon* ("A Hundred Songs").

Like many Welsh poets, he took a bardic name - "Ceiriog" - from the River Ceiriog, which flows through the Ceiriog Valley, where he was born. In his home village, the public library contains a memorial inscription to him.

### **Huw Morus - Eos Ceiriog**

Morus was one of the greatest poets writing in the strict bardic metres during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, in a period when these metres were in decline and the popularity of free metres were on the rise. He was also called Eos Ceiriog, and is regarded as one of the finest Welsh poets of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

## **BUILDINGS & ARCHITECTURE**

While it is difficult to perceive a particular style of architecture that is uniquely Wrexham's, what the breadth of architectural styles visible in the region tells a story – that of the large houses and country estates of the industrial masters and the terraced houses and cottages of workers through which industrial fortunes were made, and the pubs and 'stiwts' and chapels which formed the cornerstones of the working class communities.

It is easier perhaps to find a series of materials that form a core part of Wrexham's Sense of Place palette. These include Ruabon red bricks, terracotta chimneys and architectural decorations, the Grosvenor blue bricks further east towards the border.

**In addition, there are a number of buildings that form useful architectural icons for the area, and which with further popular usage in marketing materials etc., it would be possible to increase their recognition by visitors and hence their iconic stature. Such buildings and structures include Rossett Mill, famously painted by Turner, Gressford mining disaster memorial (-interestingly the two wheels – that of the mine shaft and the water wheel could form an interesting 'device' in design terms), Yale's tomb in St Giles Church and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. Both Erddig and Chirk are also distinctive in their appearance and merit inclusion in the list.**

## **FOOD AND DRINK**

When considering the food and drink of the area, there are two main considerations – the larder – what are the typical or notable foods of the area and the producers.

### **The Wrexham Larder**

The water in this region seems to be of particularly good quality for the brewing industry, and, coupled with the fact that Wrexham reputedly had over 1,000 pubs and inns at one point, it is perhaps not so surprising that beer and brewing features highly in the local larder.

The rich pasturelands of the region helped to create a thriving dairy industry in the region, which only saw a decline in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but thankfully is now enjoying something of a comeback due to the success of the Welsh cheese industry and a growth in artisan ice-cream producers.

The land in the Wrexham area is also suited to growing vines, and North East Wales's only commercially producing (and prize-winning) vineyard is situated within the county.

The growth in consumer interest in the provenance of food – especially meat and poultry has led to a growth in organic and home farmed meat in the past decade. This region is rich in high quality home reared beef and lamb producers, which in turn has supported the continuance of the tradition of good, local family butchers.

### **Plassey Brewery**

A historic brewery, capitalising on the particularly good brewing water quality in the area that gave rise to the brewing industry of Wrexham and the surrounding areas. They produce alcoholic beverages: real ales. Plassey Bitter, Welsh Boarder Exhibition Ale, Fusilier, Dragons Breath Real Ale, bitter and beer.

### **The Original Welsh Oggie Co**

Make Welsh oggies – a type of pasty. Giant sized Welsh oggies, contents Welsh Beef, leeks, potato, onion, gravy Regular sized oggies - contents Welsh Lamb and Mint, Jumbo sized sausage rolls

### **Tyn Twll Welsh Meats**

Homebred beef and lamb killed and hung the old fashioned way. They make burgers from homebred meat to their own recipe.

### **Knolton Farmhouse Cheese**

Cheesemakers making Farmhouse Mature Cheddar, Cheshire, Red Leicester And Double Gloucester.

### **Worthenbury Wines**

Only vineyard in North Wales producing quality wine from classic grape varieties (e.g. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir). The wines are ripened in long poly-tunnels and the wine, one white and one red each year, has won various prizes.

### **J T Vernon Ltd**

Prize-winning Family butcher with over a century of history. Selling Welsh Beef, Lamb, Pork and Poultry. They have a range of sixty homemade sausages, home cured bacon, pies at their butchers deli and coffee shop.

### **Woodlands Farmhouse Ice Cream**

A farm based luxury ice cream, made using double cream and milk fresh from their own dairy herd. They also retail some of the best foods from around the country, using only small manufacturers as suppliers.

### **Bellis Brothers Limited**

Seasonal farm grown seasonal fruit and vegetables available from the Farm shop or PYO.

**Farmer's Market**

Queens Square, Wrexham the third Friday in the month

**WI Market**

Every Friday between 10.00am – 12.00 noon at the Memorial Hall, Wrexham

## CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS

As in many other parts of Wales, music forms the bedrock of the cultural scene in the Wrexham area. As already discussed, Male Voice Choirs are certainly at the forefront of the cultural palette, as are silver bands, harp playing and of course Eisteddfodau. However, these are complemented by a special mix of contemporary, community and high quality international arts activities which makes for a dynamic arts offer.

The region is rich in cultural venues ranging from the William Aston Hall, Stiwt Theatre, The Little Theatre and Grove Park, Yale central station, open air venues at Erddig and arts galleries at Yale and in Wrexham Library. In addition to these more formal arts venues, churches in the region also form venues for a wide range of cultural activities ranging from recitals and concerts to art exhibitions and pageants.

The Wrexham Arts festival in May is developing a good reputation and now attracts some significant artists and performance groups.

In general more can be done to promote cultural events suitable for visitors through tourism networks. It may also be possible to harness the wealth of local talent to produce a series of events specifically targeting visitors and showcasing the cultural wealth of the area during the high points of the visitor season – presumably the summer months, when traditionally theatrical venues are at their quietest.

There are some notable contemporary musicians from the area that are worth mentioning such as the previously mentioned Llyr Williams and Brian Hughes.

**It would be good to provide guidance for people in the hospitality industry and those running tourism related businesses with regard to music from the area that can be played to create an appropriate ambience.** These days, Wales has much more to shout about than hymn singing and harp playing. There is Welsh music to suit each mood and

situation, ranging from classical to contemporary, folk to jazz. Sain and Flach are two leading Welsh record labels that are happy to advise on a range of suitable music from their catalogues. Sain: [www.sain.wales.com](http://www.sain.wales.com) and Flach [www.flach.co.uk](http://www.flach.co.uk)

Craftmakers and applied artists are also a feature of the region, ranging from the basketmakers of Bangor on Dee to the traditional cabinet makers and wood carvers of the Ceiriog Valley.



## **THE GREAT OUTDOORS**

Wrexham's townscapes are complemented by a range of natural landscapes ranging from lush valleys to hills and heather moorelands. It is rich in cultivated parklands including those of Erddig and Chirk with their special flower collections – the national Iris collection at Erddig and a notable collection of snowdrops at Chirk. Other managed landscapes include Alyn Waters Country Park.

The beautiful Ceiriog Valley, reclaimed from industry, offers visitors a wealth of opportunities for exploring the great outdoors in the region. Famously described by David Lloyd George as a “little piece of heaven on earth” it offers many circular walks from villages, pheasant shooting and fishing and is rich in wildlife.

The canal offers another way to explore the great outdoors of the region, whether on the canal or by walking the walkways alongside it to enjoy the diverse but special wildlife habitats that waterways support.

There are some species of wildlife that Wrexham can and should talk about as part of its Sense of Place such as the special butterflies (e.g. a colony of Grizzled Skipper butterflies) and flora at Marford quarry. This disused sand and gravel quarry was originally opened in 1927 to provide materials for the construction of the Mersey Tunnel, quarrying ceased in 1971 when the 39 acres were allowed to regenerate naturally. The area was designated a SSSI in 1989 and 26 acres were purchased in 1990 by the North Wales Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve.

In addition, there is a growing population of otters along the banks of the River Alyn and Red Kites seem to have successfully re-established themselves at the top end of the Ceiriog Valley.

Already, there is a good collection of walking routes available in the region. Many are detailed on the Wrexham County and Borough Website. This collection offers a range of walks incorporating various ability level and a

cross section of special interest walks including industrial landscape, historic landscape, wildlife rich etc. **More could possibly be done to package these specifically for visitors to the region and to develop a set of more in-depth cultural information around these walks as well as develop new ones.**

In terms of visitor perception, Wrexham continues to be identified with the town rather than with the county with all that offers in terms of the great outdoors, and **any branding work relating to Wrexham in a tourism context would do well to address this and to develop strategies to promote the wildlife and great outdoors of the region.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Defining and positioning the Wrexham offer for visitors**

The Town of Wrexham dominates the view visitors and potential visitors have of the Wrexham region. Future branding work and marketing campaigns need to continue to focus on teaching the visitor market that Wrexham has much more to offer than a historic town with good shopping. **Clarifying the offer for visitors is an important activity in terms of the ongoing success of the region in terms of attracting visitors and keeping them within the region.**

### **Website**

In looking at developing the identity of Wrexham as a visitor destination, development of a tourism microsite may be useful. At present, web based tourist information is located on the Wrexham County and Borough Website which is also used to disseminate community and council information, everything from information on Local Council Members to refuse collection. This undermines the sense of Wrexham as an appealing visitor destination, and **a web environment with improved design, visitor focused copy and strong images of all that the region has to offer would be a valuable development.**

### **Itineraries – cultural journeys**

**In order to help visitors make sense of the cultural offer in Wrexham, developing a set of itineraries based on historical or topic themes could be beneficial** (- see Visit Scotland's website for some good examples of how they do it). Consider blending history, historic characters, myth, arts and culture and dining or food experiences into these itineraries. These can be useful not just for the visitor but as the basis for travel press familiarisation visits and stories.

### **Tools for assisting visitors to access the Wrexham lifestyle**

Information and knowledge at ground level amongst Tourism businesses – especially within the hospitality sector – is key to enabling visitors to access key aspects of life in Wrexham today. Often, we overlook our everyday lives

and fail to recognise which aspects may be interesting to visitors. **It is important that those in the hospitality industry are aware of what aspects of Wrexham life is being promoted to visitors and that they have easy access to a tool that provides them with essential information such as contact details for choirs or silver bands, dates of sheepdog trials and produce markets and local and regional eisteddfodau.** The Open Church Network is already active in the area but yet more needs to be done to link this organisation and local churches and chapels with tourism providers.

**Managing a comprehensive database of events in the region aimed at visitors and the tourism sector would be a major step forward. This needs to be web based and easily liked to by tourism operator websites and easily downloadable so that a weekly list can be printed out by accommodation providers for their guests.**

#### **Bringing the arts industry and tourism businesses closer together**

More can be done to deliver relevant information about arts and events in the Wrexham area that may be of interest to visitors.

**A database of craftspeople and artists happy to welcome visitors to their workshops would be really useful, likewise that for choir and brass band rehearsals.** This kind of activity is not only valued in terms of the visitor's cultural experience, but is also a great wet weather activity to promote – and supports the local economy.

The summer months are traditionally quiet for theatres. It may be possible to work with some to support programming that might be of interest to cultural visitors- cultural showcases etc. Also, more could be done to enable tourism community groups to set up small events such as storytelling, harp and song recitals etc. This would require the pulling together of a list of artists that are willing to work with the tourism industry in this way – the Arts Council would be a good starting point, with their Night Out scheme helpful in underwriting costs of mounting such events.

### **Music from Wrexham**

There is now contemporary and traditional Welsh music of quality to suit any mood and environment. **Both Sain and Fflach music labels would be happy to advise on music that is 'of Wrexham' that can be promoted to tourism operators and are often happy to discuss significant discounts for tourism businesses.**

### **Embracing the story of Welsh Language**

**Training is needed to help those on the tourism front line to have the confidence to use the Welsh language in their businesses and as a welcome for visitors.** The Welsh Language Board is keen to work with organisations and bodies to support such activity and it would be worth meeting with them to discuss options and opportunities. It is no longer about recruiting individuals to learn the language, more about an appreciation of the language and its cultural context and techniques and guidance for welcoming visitors the 'Welsh way' with 'croeso', bore da' prynhawn da' etc.

**Developing a range of Wrexham branded tools for use by tourism operators might also prove valuable.** Consider tent cards or coasters with a few Welsh words and phonetic spellings and perhaps some of the history of the Welsh language in the region, and some of the area's special dialect as well as quotes from some of the famous poets and writers who have commented on the beauty and industry of the area – again a project that the Welsh Language Board may be interested in partnering.

### **Encourage usage of traditional Wrexham materials in a tourism context**

Wherever possible, the innovative use of materials traditional and appropriate for the Wrexham region should be encouraged – whether in renovations, new builds, public art, interior decoration and so on.

### **Iconic Buildings and landscape photography audit and stock development**

It is important that the photography stock held by Wrexham County Council and other tourism agencies involved in marketing the region is kept up to date with photographs of the highest quality and artistry of landscape, buildings and townscapes within the region. Any building or built environment has the possibility of being drab and lacking in interest when photographed badly on a dull day. Likewise a good photographer using interesting angles, good colouration etc can make the most ordinary of buildings into a star.

**As part of the Sense of Place process, an audit of photographic resource is often useful and a commissioning of a fresh set of photographs from a good photographer. Equally, it is important that good quality photographs are made available to tourism businesses in the region so that a uniform set of promotional images of the area are used across the board in promotional materials – as well as to decorate bedrooms and premises.**

### **Raising awareness of Wrexham's unique flavours and superb larder**

More training is needed to build awareness amongst tourism businesses of the wonderful range of foods and beverages that Wrexham produces and how they can easily incorporate them on menus and promote them to visitors. In addition to promoting the range of foods, more information about food events such as produce and local farmers markets would be valued.

Another initiative that may help to raise awareness amongst tourism businesses of the range of superb ingredients available on their doorstep is a 'Wrexham menu competition' to encourage use and promotion of the region's larder on menus.

### **Developing a range of Wrexham signature dishes**

With its varied larder and range of food producers Wrexham could look at developing a range of signature dishes. Working with good local chefs and food producers in the region it would be valuable to create a range of iconic

signature dishes possibly based on old recipes from the area – such as the recipe and banqueting records of some of the large houses, or the food habits associated with the industries of the area such as miner’s lunches (similar to a ploughman’s lunch), to make using the produce of local producers. Working in partnership with a commercial producer, it may be also be possible to pre-prepare some of these for use in the catering industry of the region, while training to enable those in the hospitality industry to prepare these recipes from scratch would also be key to the success of the initiative.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There is much that makes Wrexham an attractive area for cultural visitors, and it is well served with attractions, history, events and activities to satisfy their curiosity. However, the region suffers from a lack of distinction between Wrexham town and Wrexham the broader region.

Visitors and potential visitors are unclear as to what they might expect from a visit other than shopping and other urban based activities. This is both a barrier and an opportunity to manage how to raise the profile of Wrexham as a visitor destination. A key success factor – considering the steady increase of the web as a tool for researching destinations and booking holidays – in developing the sense of Wrexham as a visitor destination is to improve the web environment that visitors encounter when researching the region, and making full use of good quality images and the already good information offered by the County and Borough website's tourism section.

The area already has a number of iconic buildings, such as Chirk and Erddig Castles, but more need to be developed to portray the range of history and cultural experience that visitors can expect. It is rich in wildlife and beautiful and interesting landscapes to explore and this needs to be better reflected through the copy and images available via the web, and then replicated via printed promotional material to provide a comprehensive and consistent brand image and offer to the visitor market, making full usage of the Sense of Place palette described in this report.

Visitors do not respect county and borough boundaries, and Wrexham has much in common with other counties in the North East of Wales, including Denbighshire and Flintshire, both in terms of landscape, industrial heritage and history. This is where the Borderlands partnership becomes meaningful and work to strengthen the identity of this corner of Wales through it is beneficial in order to teach visitors that North Wales has more to offer than Snowdonia which continues to dominate the marketing imagery of the region. At the same time, there is much that makes Wrexham special and its unique mix makes a desirable destination proposition.



This work is timely. Not only are there a number of activities that are helping to attract attention to Wrexham and the Borderlands region at present – such as the publication later this year of a book entitled Real Wrexham by Dr Grahame Davies, the success of Fron Male Voice Choir, and of course the nomination of Pontcysyllte Aqueduct for World Heritage Site status, but also it should benefit from Liverpool’s Capital of Culture activities in 2008. The more that can be done now to position Wrexham as a vibrant cultural destination the better.

## REFERENCES

A wide number of sources were used to research elements of Wrexham's Sense of Place palette. They include:

*Wrexham County Borough Website*

*Wikipedia website*

*BBC Wales website*

*Food Wales website*

Various other special interest and North East Wales related websites

*A Pocket Guide to the Customs and Traditions of Wales by Trefor M Owen*

*Tales from Wales by Harri Webb*

*Medieval Wales by David Walker*

*Medieval Wales by A D Carr*

*A History of Wales by John Davies*

*Dictionary of Celtic Mythology by Peter Beresford Ellis*

*Historic Atlas of Britain edited by Nigel Saul*