Philanthropy and Deafness in Wales, 1847-1914

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Abstract

Most deaf institutions which emerged in the nineteenth century operated on a voluntary basis, relying on charitable donations to survive. These institutions, and thus the deaf pupils who were educated in them, were drawn into the discourses of power, nationality, religion and gender which came with its reliance on an interconnected local philanthropic elite. This article looks at how the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Swansea - Wales' first deaf institution - took part in these philanthropic debates, explores the specific Welsh dimension, and examines how its methods of philanthropy created a distinctive construction of deafness.

On 15 September 1848, the newspaper *The Welshman* printed a report from the first Annual General Meeting of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. It reflected upon the first year of Wales' first formal institution for boarding and educating deaf children, founded in a small house in Aberystwyth with two day scholars (though, by the end of the first year, eight children had been admitted):

> Now if it be the duty (as it unquestionably is) of the affluent inhabitants of Wales to minister to the instruction and relief of their ignorant and destitute neighbours, it is most emphatically their duty to provide for the education of those surrounded

with a double wall of ignorance - THE DEAF AND DUMB OF THE PRINCIPALITY.[1]

With no previous forms of institutionalised education for deaf children available in the Principality, the philanthropists and wealthy benefactors of Wales were bound by 'duty' to provide care and schooling to those described as afflicted or ignorant. The report illustrated the urgency, tragedy and sense of pride which characterised the Institution. It recognised the need for deaf schooling, and sent a plea for assistance to those who could help, informed by dramatic and tragic interpretations of the children's deafness.

The expansive records of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb provide an excellent opportunity for historians of philanthropy and deafness to explore how these concepts intersected with each other in Victorian and Edwardian Wales. Founded in 1847 in Aberystwyth before moving to Swansea in 1850, the Institution presented itself publicly as an essential feature of both local and national life, providing education to Wales' deaf children, who were regularly presented in publicity as helpless and pitiable without the education it provided. The Institution had a staunch ideology of voluntaryism and independence from state regulation, which it clung to even after the state increased its involvement in special education in the second half of the nineteenth century, culminating in the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act of 1893 which recommended a programme of grants and state inspection for existing voluntary deaf schools such as the Cambrian Institution. The Institution operated with a hierarchical structure in which the Committee, the Principal and the school's benefactors exercised varying levels influence over how its pupils

[1] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Aberystwyth, for the year ending 30th June, 1848* (Aberystwyth, 1848), 25.

were taught and how the school (and therefore deafness in general) was projected to the public.

Attention in this article will therefore be focused on those who contributed to the running and the finances of the Institution – often wealthy or influential elites with a significant local profile. Beginning by looking at how issues of national and civic pride created local and national philanthropic networks, the article will then examine the backgrounds of the Cambrian Institution Committee members. Many of those involved had connections with other charitable, governmental and social institutions, and the article will ask how these alliances affected the running of the Institution. It will go on to question what might have been the motivations for involvement in philanthropy, which has been the subject of a wide-ranging historical debate. A web of personal, social, civic and religious factors comprised what Richard Trainor calls the 'mixed motives' of the philanthropist.[2] These motives were complex, informed by contemporary attitudes towards religion and gender, and could sometimes create tension between those involved. Finally, the article will question how these philanthropic alliances and motivations affected the ways in which deafness was presented to the public. In its ongoing pursuit of funds, the Cambrian's pupils were more frequently presented as objects of charity and pity, with public meetings and examinations using deafness as a tool for spectacle. Most importantly, even if many pupils were not aware of the decisions made by the Committee responsible for them, they undoubtedly had an impact on their everyday lives as pupils in the Institution.

National and civic pride

Throughout its existence, the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb traded on a mixture of local pride and civic duty. Its publicity highlighted the prestige the Institution will

[2] Richard Trainor, 'Urban elites in Victorian Britain', *Urban History*, 12 (1985), 3.

bring to the town, the visitors and interested supporters it will attract, and the duty it was fulfilling. From its beginning as a small school in Aberystwyth, the Institution positioned itself as a important asset of both its host town and the country of Wales. This message was first sent when an 'uncommonly well attended' public meeting was held in Aberystwyth Town Hall to establish the school in 1847. *The Welshman* newspaper highlighted the presence of 'the most respectable inhabitants of the town'. [3] It was immediately made clear that Wales was in need of a school for deaf children and had a duty to found one. A motion called attention to the fact that 'there exist in the Country no means whatsoever for their instruction'[4] The Cambrian Institution was immediately portrayed as the only solution. There would, according to the plans formulated at the meeting, be one institution in Wales, to be placed in Aberystwyth at its 'most central point'.[5] The Cambrian Institution, it was argued, would be immediately occupying an important role in national and local consciousness.

Early publicity continued to explain this. The first Annual Report, circulated to current and potential subscribers, introduced the Institution as essential for Wales' position on the national stage:

> England, Ireland, and Scotland, have Institutions for their Deaf and Dumb, in which these afflicted sons and daughters of humanity are instructed in all that belongs to their present interests and their future welfare... Wales has at length

[3] *The Welshman*, 5 February 1847.

[4] Swansea, West Glamorgan Archive Service (hereafter WGAS), E/Cam 1/1, Minute Book (hereafter MB) 1847-55. From an account of the origins of the Institution at the front of the minute book.

[5] *The Welshman*, 5 February 1847.

> awoke to a sense of her duty, in relation to this long neglected class of her children.[6]

The Report implied that Wales needed to provide institutional education to its deaf children, not just to relieve the 'affliction' of deafness but also to fulfil its role as serious figure in the provision of special education. Indeed, this Report came only a year after the publication of the 'Blue Books' - which infamously attacked education using negative generalisations about the Welsh population - and was in all probability responding to the harsh criticisms levelled at Welsh education. In spite of the uproar at the commissioners' Anglocentic perspective and insults towards the Welsh people, the 'Blue Books' sparked educational reformers to address issues of quality and sparseness of education for children in Wales.[7] Though the Blue Books did not specifically mention deaf children, the formation of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was undoubtedly a response to a climate of national anxiety about education.

This is confirmed by the role played in its formation by Hugh Owen, whose 1843 'Letter to the Welsh People' had made him a key voice calling for educational reform.[8] Owen, in his role as honourable secretary of the reform group, the Cambrian Educational Society, was instrumental in setting up the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. Owen's involvement largely seemed to come to an end once the Institution began, and he was thanked at the 1847 public meeting at Aberystwyth for 'the part he had taken in calling attention to

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[6] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *The First Annual Report of the Royal Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Aberystwyth, for the year ending 30th June 1848* (Aberystwyth, 1848), p.7.

[7] Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon W. Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff, 2003), p.63; D.G. Evans, *A History of Wales, 1815-1906* (Cardiff, 1989), p.127.

[8] Jones and Roderick, *Education in* Wales, p.53; Evans, *History of Wales, 1815-1906*, p.102.

the necessity of making provision for the instruction of the deaf and dumb of Wales.'[9] Through Owen, the newly-formed Cambrian Institution immediately placed itself in the discourses of Welsh education and local pride.

When the Institution relocated to Swansea in 1850 to allow more pupils to attend, the move did not alter its sense of national duty, and its publicity material continued to remind potential subscribers of the national problem of deaf education, and its importance to Wales' identity and welfare. The Annual Report for 1851 maintained the urgent tone on which the Institution had been founded. Pleading for funds for a new building to increase the number of pupils who could be accommodated in the school, it asked how many 'poor deaf and dumb children in Wales must still be doomed to the helplessness and hopelessness of ignorance and dependence'[10] The concept of deaf education as a national emergency had retained its place as a selling point for potential philanthropists. Yet a new location brought with it new issues of civic pride and the role the Institution could play in the town's status.

Even before it had been set up, the Swansea incarnation of the Cambrian Institution had carved itself a role in the discourse and reputation of its new town. In 1849 Rev. George Acklom (who a year later would become the Institution's Honourable Secretary) wrote in *The Cambrian* newspaper of the benefits of moving the Institution to Swansea. He saw the need for educating deaf children as part of his desire to ensure 'Swansea should occupy the position to which she may justly lay claim as a rising city.' Thus, for Acklom, special education slotted into a plan to improve Swansea in general:

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[9] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/1, MB 1847-55. From an account of the origins of the Institution at the front of the minute book.

[10] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *The Thirtieth Annual Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea, for the year ending 30th June, 1877* (Swansea, 1877), p.8.

> [Swansea's] arms will soon extend themselves on every side, and her prosperity will draw influence to herself: she must not, however, forget her duty, or to realize her own proper pleasure... viz., the seeking to blend charity with trade, and combine within her walls institutions, which shall themselves become moral ornaments to the town, and objects of interest either to her inhabitants or visitors.

Acklom's enthusiasm revealed the businesslike ambitions underlying the move, and the excitement that a new institution could generate. The Institution was discussed almost like a tourist attraction, with its role in the town's cultural life given as much thought as the moral necessity of its existence. The two concepts are synonymous and interlocking; Acklom finished by demanding that his town 'must be able to say, not only "here are my ships, my warehouses, my merchandize," but also "here are my charities, my institutions, my grateful hearts."'[11]

Acklom's picture of Swansea brings to mind a town priding itself on a rising reputation. From the latter eighteenth century, Swansea's entertainment and tourist opportunities were being used by its local leaders to represent the town as a fashionable seaside resort, dubbed the 'Brighton of Wales'. As Peter Stead explains, the town's status as a haven for upper-class pastimes and activities had declined by the mid-nineteenth century, when the Cambrian Institution came into being, though Swansea attempted to hold onto 'echoes of that eighteenth-century fashionability'.[12] The town was still projecting itself as a tourist destination, something which could be cemented by the respectability that the Cambrian Institution would bring. Acklom noted, for example, how new institutions in 'Liverpool and

[11] *The Cambrian*, 28 September 1849.

[12] Peter Stead, 'The entertainment of the people' in G. Williams (ed.), *Swansea: An Illustrated History* (Swansea, 1990), p.246.

other large towns' brought an 'influx of visitors to the town and its institutions... again a sure means of increasing influence, and assisting to raise the public character.'[13]

Much of the Cambrian Institution's early reputation was built upon its status as Wales' only deaf school, the solution to a gap in the nation's education and conscience. This was a distinction which could shine favourably on the town itself. Thus the school's attitudes towards its first sign of competition are important to examine. The Llandaff School for the Deaf and Dumb, set up by Alexander Melville in 1862 after his exit from the Cambrian Institution, was the second deaf school in Wales. It began with one pupil, adding more until moving to a converted pub in the mid-1860s, providing accommodation for 20 pupils by 1869.[14] The Cambrian Institution did not see the new school as a supplement to the limited places available in Swansea, but instead feared the possibility of pupils defecting. Indeed, in 1863 it emerged that two pupils simply disappeared from the Cambrian Institution, the Principal only finding out through personal investigation that they had gone to Llandaff.[15]

As well as the administrative and financial implications of losing pupils, a key factor in the rivalry was its perceived threat to the Institution's identity and public image. The Cambrian Institution's Committee had already voiced concerns about the reputational damage caused by Melville's public feud, and his new school only heightened existing tensions. Thus in 1867, when the Cambrian Institution's Committee noticed an article in a newspaper about the Llandaff School, the Honourable Secretary was asked to send the last report of the Cambrian Institution to the newspaper's editor 'with a letter calling his attention to the fact that this

[13] *The Cambrian*, 28 September 1849.

[14] Doreen Woodford, *A Man and his School: The Story of the Llandaff School for the Deaf and* Dumb (Cardiff, 1996), 6. This account, written by the granddaughter of two of the school's pupils, provides an excellent summary of the school's history and foundation.

[15] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 2, PR 1860-76, 4 March 1863.

Institution was founded in the Year 1847.'[16] Clearly concerned by the attention being directed at the new school, the Cambrian Institution here acted in defence. It attempted to use the length of its establishment as a selling point, projecting itself as a more reliable Institution than the fledgling Llandaff. It is unclear, however, whether this ongoing negativity extended to the Llandaff committee. Their Annual Report in 1874 reprinted a *Western Mail* article which compared the two: 'The School at Swansea has been a source of great advantage, and has been in existence for a longer period than that founded at Llandaff under the auspices of Mr Melville'.[17] Though the Llandaff school may not always have taken part in the rivalry, both committees placed great importance the Institutions' public images, particularly the Cambrian Institution's treasured claim to be the first deaf institution in Wales.

For the Cambrian Institution, the sense of national and civic pride, and its role as the first and largest deaf institution in Wales, developed into a regular publicity tool. By fulfilling its duty of educating deaf children, the Institution gained the authority to instil a sense of responsibility into its potential subscribers and donors, and bring new supporters into the fold. A good example was its dealings with the various industrial works in South Wales, which became a source of income and an ally for the Institution. A Committee member suggested in 1861 that all workers employed in the 'large works' of the district should donate one penny a year from their wages.[18] The idea spread quickly and later in the year *The Cambrian* newspaper announced the arrival of the 'Wonderful Penny' fundraising scheme. Each worker in 'the great coal, iron, copper, tin and other works in South Wales' was to give

[16] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/3, MB 1867-87, 4 February 1867.

[17] Llandaff School for the Deaf and Dumb, *Report of the School for the Deaf and Dumb established at Llandaff, 1874* (Llandaff, 1874).

[18] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 24 April 1861.

a penny to the Institution.[19] The works played a notable role in donating towards the Cambrian Institution, supported by approving reports in the local media. In addition to being a key source of income, the industrial sponsorship contributed to the sense of pride and duty being fostered by the Institution, as well as building networks across Wales.

National networks were crucial for the Cambrian Institution's fundraising. A series of networks were set up in locations across Wales, with local volunteers given the task of collecting subscriptions and 'auxiliary' funds, the local collections. The school's founder, Charles Rhind, took it upon himself to travel around the principality holding meetings to establish new auxiliaries.[20] A long list of their names and duties filled the back pages of every Annual Report, a status symbol which could no doubt be construed as a reward for their efforts. The Reports, as well as Annual General Meetings (AGMs) held in the town, regularly praised Committee members' selflessness and benevolence. The 1895 Report praised the Institution's auxiliaries in this way: 'It is difficult to realize the self-denial required to make personal application (often more than once) to so many.'[21] With philanthropic work such a demanding exercise, the social status and attention gained from appearing in Annual Reports and newspapers may indeed have been considered a reward. Indeed, in 1859 the decision was taken, 'That if any Lady or Gentleman finish one Ward of this Institution, or subscribe £50 a ward shall be named after such benefactor whose name shall be placed over the door.'[22]

[19] *The Cambrian*, 9 August 1861.

[20] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *The Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea, for the year ending 30th June, 1869* (Swansea, 1869), p.6.

[21] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *The Forty-Eigth Annual Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea, for the year ending 30th June, 1895* (Swansea, 1895).

[22] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 18 January 1859.

Occasionally, the actions of those collecting money directly affected who was brought into the Institution. Districts built up reputations and relations with the Committee through the amount of money they were raising for the Institution, and this helped inform the decisions of whom to assign the limited places available. Thus a pupil from Aberdare was readmitted free in 1860 because the Aberdare auxiliary fund had contributed £55 to the friends of the Institution. This was repeated in 1864, when a girl was admitted free 'in virtue of the Llandilo contribution'.[23] Occasionally these decisions were directly informed by issues of publicity, localism and image. A place was offered to a pupil from Newport in 1863, the Secretary being asked to 'call [the child's backer]'s attention to the state of our finances and to express a hope that the lad's admission on such terms will give rise to the exhibition of greater practical interest in Newport and its neighbourhood.'[24] The new pupil was seen as useful for the Institution to address financial problems and gain support from new towns.

The pupils, then, were drawn into shifting and uncertain processes of philanthropy, becoming subjects of relationships between different sets of local elites. Moreover, it is important to recognise the Committee members' role in shaping public opinion, keeping the Institution running and cementing its local and national reputation. This article will now examine the identities of the philanthropic figures on the Committee of the Cambrian Institution and how their roles connected the school to the social and political landscape of Swansea. By doing this, a range of potential motivations become visible, and the wider social implications of philanthropy are opened up for discussion. Furthermore, it is important to question whether the hierarchical structures used by the Cambrian Institution created visible barriers and gaps

[23] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 4 September 1860; WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, Minute Book 1855-66, 6 April 1864.

[24] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 3 June 1863.

in power: between donors and their subjects, and between the 'afflicted' deaf children and their sympathisers, between disabled and non-disabled people.

The philanthropic elite

The everyday internal affairs of the Cambrian Institution were largely handled by the Principal and Matron, with a varying and expanding set of teachers, assistant teachers, sub-matrons and servants. Issues of finance and publicity as well as some in-house decisions were taken by an elected Committee. This Committee (who met separately from the Principal) was full of well-known figures from local government, the clergy and those with general connections to Swansea's philanthropic scene.[25] The Cambrian Institution took great care to project those organising and donating as respectable and important. Victor Golightly notes that the management board of the Institution was taken from the elite social circles of Swansea, 'diligent and capable and professional men'.[26] The identities of Committee members was an important consideration for the Institution and subject to scrutiny in the local press. A study of their backgrounds can help shed light on the inner workings of the Institution and the image it sought to maintain.

Presidents and Vice Presidents of the Cambrian Institution were drawn from the upper echelons of the local elite, and held positions in many other places of power. Henry Hussey Vivian, for example, kept his post as Vice-President for much of the duration of his term as MP for Glamorgan, and was also listed as trustee and patron of both Swansea Hospital and

[25] There are of course limited sources regarding the Principal's involvement in finance and publicity. Some Principals may well have had more contact with their committees and Auxiliaries than others – however the Principal's Reports of 1860-70 and B.H. Payne's personal letters both suggest a degree of involvement with this aspect.

[26] Victor Golightly, '"Speak on a finger and thumb": Dylan Thomas, language and the deaf', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays*, 10 (2005), 83.

Blind Institution.[27] Sir John T.D. Llewelyn, the MP for Swansea Town in 1902, was given the position of Vice President, and also held patronages and offices in the Blind Institution, Swansea Hospital, the Royal Institution of South Wales, the Swansea Scientific Society and the Swansea and South Wales Nursing Institute and Private Hospital.[28] The involvement of these notable figures was undoubtedly a stamp of credibility for the Institution.

Many Committee members actively participated in other philanthropic, industrial, governmental and leisure pursuits, and hence were part of the social, religious and political elites of Swansea. In most years represented, very few of the Committee had no immediate local connections as listed in the Trade Directories or Blind Institution and Hospital records. Mayors, MPs and key figures from Swansea council were given positions on the Committee, as well as representatives of the legal profession. In 1852, seven of the twelve Committee members of the Cambrian Institution were included in *Scammel's Bristol and South Wales Directory*'s list of the 'Nobility and Clergy' of Swansea.[29] Industry, too, was heavily represented, including members of the Vivian and Bath copper and shipowning families. Peter Stead explains that the presence of industrial leaders in Swansea's gentry were established by Swansea's emergence in the eighteenth century as a town 'first realizing its industrial potential'. For Stead, this gave way to a nineteenth century 'distinctive pattern of local leadership' led by industrialists.[30] Jones points out the blurring of high-ranking local capitalists and the gentry in industrial Welsh town such as Swansea, as capitalists adopted

[27] *Wright's Swansea Directory 1883* (Swansea: 1883); Swansea Blind Institution, *16th Annual Report* (1881)

[28] *Daily Post Swansea Directory 1900* (Swansea, 1900).

[29] *Scammel's Bristol and South Wales Directory* (Bristol, 1852).

[30] Stead, 'Entertainment of the people', 246.

'the fashions and ways of life of the gentry.'[31] Their positions in the Cambrian Institution demonstrate the role philanthropy played in the emergence of this leadership.

Whilst many on the Committee were wealthy, this was not a prerequisite for involvement. Their profile very much matches Richard Trainor's definition of the 'urban elite': not necessarily the wealthiest citizens in the town, but 'individuals of whatever socio-economic standing who held positions of leadership within major local institutions.'[32] Trainor in particular notes the interconnectedness of local government and philanthropy. This was common in many Victorian towns and is illustrated by the Committee of the Cambrian Institution. Individual figures sitting on the Committee had other roles which traversed the lines of government and voluntary activity. The Committee of 1851, for example, included Robert Eaton, who was also a councillor of Upper Ward, Swansea and the President of Swansea Infirmary.[33] What mattered, more than wealth, were connections, influence and respectability. The consistent appearance of well-known and well-connected figures on the committee confirms how important these influential links were to the Institution's public profile.

Some of the information found in contemporary trade directories also suggests that the Cambrian Institution was aligning itself with Swansea's intellectual culture. Louise Miskell has demonstrated that the formation of scientific and intelligent groups in the first half of the nineteenth century - such as the Swansea Scientific Society in 1835 - turned Swansea into

[31] Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Health, Wealth and Politics in Victorian Wales* (Swansea, 1979), p.19.

[32] Trainor, 'Urban elites', 1-2.

[33] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea, for the year ending 30th June, 1851* (Swansea, 1851); Scammel's Bristol and South Wales Directory (Bristol, 1852).

what she calls 'Wales' most enlightened and cultured town'.[34] While this reputation is largely regarded to have peaked in the 1840s, the Cambrian Institution continued to fit in with this picture. Connections to the Royal Institution of South Wales lent the Cambrian Institution much positive publicity in this respect. Formed in 1835, the Royal Institution hosted many social and interest clubs in Swansea, serving as a forum for debates and readings which attracted a broad range of people.[35] Members of the Royal Institution often held spaces on the Cambrian Institution's committee, such its presidents Lewis Llewelyn Dilwyn in 1884 and Lieutenant-Colonel William L. Morgan in 1902.[36].

One advantage of having many influential people on the Committee was the financial income they could attract through their connections. The Minute Books show a clear awareness of this. In 1852, for example, a circular letter was sent to selected elites across Wales, 'begging them to assist by influence or otherwise in carrying out the objects of charity.'[37] In difficult times, locating and using 'influence' was of crucial importance. At a meeting in 1863, the Committee proposed having meetings 'at a few of the principal places where little support is at present received such as Cardiff and Merthyr.' A Committee member was identified as 'being connected with the leading gentlemen in the former town', and was given the task of ensuring the attendance of the elites of Cardiff.[38] This was a working example of how the

[34] Louise Miskell, *Intelligent Town: An Urban History of Swansea 1780-1855* (Cardiff, 2006), p.158.

[35] G. W. Roderick, 'Education in an industrial society' in R. A. Griffiths (ed.), *The City of Swansea: Challenges & Change* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1990), p.181.

[36] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *Annual Report 1884*, *1902*; *Wright's Swansea Directory 1883* (Swansea, 1883); *Daily Post Swansea Directory 1900* (Swansea, 1900). In 1900, Morgan was also the president of the Royal Institution of South Wales (as well as Swansea Scientific Society, Swansea Art Society and Sketching Club, Swansea Chess Club and the Horticultural and Gardeners' Association.

[37] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/1, MB 1847-55, 27 April 1852.

[38] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 19 June 1863.

Cambrian Institution's group of elites could be put to use to keep the Institution afloat. It is also a signifier of how widespread this elite-led approach to philanthropy was. The tightly-knit philanthropic communities and hierarchical structures were so engrained that the Committee could rely on their connections with well-known and well-connected figures elsewhere.

The range of voluntary positions also reveal the interconnected nature of philanthropy in Swansea itself. Far from being isolated, the Cambrian Institution was part of a local network of philanthropic institutions which shared many Committee members. The Swansea and South Wales Institution for the Blind, founded in 1865 as a visiting organisation called the Society for the Teaching and Helping the Adult Blind of Swansea, was the closest of the Cambrian's philanthropic neighbours.[39] The two regularly appeared together in local discourse about special education and once came close to merging into one institution.[40] From 1863, Joseph Hall served as Honorary Secretary of both Swansea's blind and deaf institutions. Hall personifies the multi-faceted Swansea philanthropic scene. In 1888, *The Cambrian* newspaper reported on a surprise presentation to celebrate his anniversary as Honorary Secretary of the Cambrian Institution, noting that he was 'actively engaged in promoting charitable institutions in the town'. The reporter also highlighted his commitment to the ideological voluntaryism which characterised Swansea philanthropy: 'If you had a secretary that was paid, I suppose he would receive £100 a year at the least. Now that would be enough to maintain four children in this home.'[41] Hall was able to communicate between the institutions, binding together the Swansea philanthropic network.

[39] Swansea, WGAS, D D S/B, Swansea and South Wales Institution for the Blind, 'A Souvenir' (c.1935).

[40] London, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), ED 32/227: Proposed Central Institution for Blind and Deaf Children in South Wales, Minute Paper, 24 November 1914.

[41] *The Cambrian*, 14 September 1888.

The group that might be termed the philanthropic elite at the heart of the Cambrian Institution, then, was a complex and heavily overlapping network. However, it is worth enquiring how they interacted with each other. The myriad links to other sources of power in the town – often emanating from one person – kept the Institution afloat, but also brought political and personal disputes. These potentially continued behind the scenes of the Institution well after the Melville conflict. Dr Alfred Eichholz, the Board of Education's inspector for special schools, discussed this in his 1906 'Historical Retrospect' about changes in medical and education organisation. His interview with the school's medical officer, Dr. Arbour Stephens, explained that 'the difficulties of the situation were due to political causes rather than to any hesitation on the part of the Committee to deal with the physical needs of the children.'[42] Letters from this era reveal that there were indeed changes being made to the curriculum and medical provision, although there is little record of any 'political' disputes. Competing interests on the Committee were perhaps unavoidable. Similarly, the presence of busy public figures appears to have caused organisational issues. 'Great difficulty being experienced informing the Members of the Committee arising from more attendance of the Members,' complained a member in 1855.[43] Early minutes seem to suggest that the main problem of having a high-profile Committee was not political factionalism, but getting everybody in the same room.

Women and philanthropy

Though the Committee was almost exclusively male, the philanthropic role of women in the Cambrian Institution was fundamental. Their presence was visible from the early stages,

[42] London, TNA, ED 224/18, 'Royal Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb: Historical Retrospect', 2.

[43] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 6 February 1855.

particularly in money collection. Women held roles as secretaries and collectors in auxiliaries across Wales. In early reports of collection, the role assigned to women is carved out. An 1850 newspaper report of Principal Charles Rhind's fundraising visit to South Wales congratulated a woman in Llandovery collecting 20 guineas for the Institution, 'an example worthy of imitation by the fair sex, and which we cannot but urge on their attention.'[44] From 1860, a specific Ladies' Committee was put in place 'consisting of one (if possible) from the family of each Committee man, for the purpose of inspecting the domestic arrangement and reporting to the Committee from time to time'.[45] This set the template for an active but highly gender-specific picture of female philanthropy in the Cambrian Institution: the Ladies' Committee was independent but defined strongly by links to husbands and families, with advice mostly restricted to issues of domesticity.[46] Despite this, the Ladies' Committee reported regularly and quickly developed an influential profile.

The role of the Ladies' Committee in the Melville conflict just two years after its formation is perhaps the best demonstration of its autonomy. One of the factors leading to Melville's exit was his 'ungentlemanly and insulting' conduct towards the members of the Ladies' Committee, whose physical access to the wider Institution he had blocked. According to the Chairman, Melville had complained that the Ladies' Committee was having an 'injurious effect at the Institution' and, revealingly, 'that his authority had been interfered with'.[47] At a special meeting to discuss the incident, the main Committee's sympathies rested firmly with

[44] *The Cambrian*, 5 July 1850.

[45] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, Minute Book 1855-66, 17 July 1860.

[46] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 24 July 1860.

[47] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 11 June 1862. These quotations are taken from a copy of the Chairman's letter to Alexander Melville on 5 June 1862, which was reprinted in the minutes.

the Ladies' Committee; its members were to resume their work 'under the assurance that they will meet with no obstacle to the performance of their useful services.'[48]

The resulting debate revealed much about women's perceived status amongst the male Committee members. The Committee demanded that Melville should respect the Ladies' Committee 'in sustaining the credit and respectability of the establishment.' Again, their importance to the Cambrian Institution was framed by demography and gender: 'with an unmarried Principal at its head, and no educated woman resident in the house, the Ladies' Committee has been of signal service'.[49] This implied that the presence of 'educated women' elevated the social position of the Institution. It was also seen to counter-balance the potential moral issue of the unmarried Principal. Philanthropic connections through marriage appear to have been widespread throughout Swansea. In 1884, the committee of Swansea Blind Institution featured the wives of four of the men sitting on the Cambrian Institution's Committee.[50] A network of female philanthropic elites was firmly in place.

The actions of the Ladies' Committee of the Cambrian Institution illustrate the rise of the female visitor in nineteenth century institutions. The role of women in the Cambrian Institution – from members of auxiliaries to the formation of a powerful Ladies' Committee – mirrors the narrative set out in Frank Prochaska's work on women and philanthropy. Female visitors to charitable institutions often began with minor domestic observations, later becoming figures of power whose decisions were rarely challenged by male Committee members.[51] Of course, the 'visitor' was not a role limited to institutional visiting: there was a

[48] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 11 June 1862.

[49] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 23 May 1862.

[50] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *Annual Report 1884*; Swansea and South Wales Institution for the Blind, *The Sixteenth Annual Report, for the year ending 31st December 1881* (Swansea, 1881).

[51] F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980), p.23; p.143.

simultaneous expansion of women philanthropists visiting people in their own homes. Anne Summers has explored the home-to-home visiting of the female philanthropist, which could involve visiting sick residents of their town, organising social meetings or participating in Sunday schools.[52] The female philanthropists of the Cambrian Institution were thus participating in an increasingly open field of women's philanthropy.

Prochaska's argument that philanthropy represented 'the leisured woman's most obvious outlet for self-expression' hints at the boundaries of action which were being set: women were finding themselves open to a public sphere, albeit one restricted by class and pre-defined gender roles geared towards notions of female domesticity. These gender roles played to existing Victorian notions of the female character. Prochaska highlights the concept of women's 'nature' and 'mission'; the image of woman as caring, compassionate, moral guardians opened up philanthropy as a respectable area of women's involvement in the public sphere.[53] In other words, this was a type of public engagement fully informed by the private sphere. Historians such as June Hannam have discussed this public-private overlap in women's philanthropy and its implications for women's lives and opportunities. Hannam argues that philanthropy offered women opportunities outside of the home, but was restricted to individual voluntary work rather than any kind of political action. She points to figures such as Mary Carpenter, who worked with 'juvenile delinquents' but ignored the issue of women's emancipation, as evidence that female philanthropists were more interested in 'the problem of poverty rather than the specific needs of women.'[54] Summers continues this

[52] Anne Summers, 'A home from home – women's philanthropic work in the nineteenth century' in S. Burman (ed.), *Fit Work for women* (London, 1979), pp.34-5.

[53] Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p.6.

[54] June Hannam, 'Women and politics' in J. Purvis (ed.), *Women's History in Britain, 1850-1945* (London, 1995).

theme, pointing out that the gender roles set out for women were largely conservative.[55] The Cambrian Institution, with its Ladies' Committee drawn exclusively from the families of existing Committee members, demonstrates this complex relationship with the concept of women's independence.

A significant aspect of women's philanthropic work in the Cambrian Institution was organising the bazaars. These were large events which featured stalls and entertainment to raise money for and awareness of the school. When the male Committee decided in December 1863 that a bazaar should be held, they found that 'the ladies have already moved in the matter', and the responsibility was handed to the Ladies' Committee. The result was a 'Grand Bazaar and Soiree' featuring handmade items by the women running the stalls, with musical entertainment in the evening. The organisation of the bazaar was accepted as the undisputed domain of women: *The Cambrian* newspaper wrote that women 'proved the motive power' of the event. 'Yesterday,' the reporter wrote, 'must be regarded as essentially guided, governed, and carried through, by the fair sex.'[56] Prochaska again places the trend for bazaars – which were widespread in the nineteenth century – in the emerging discourses of female philanthropy. Once again they represent the merging of public and private: a chance to escape domestic routines, but governed by the prescribed definitions of the female character as compassionate and moral.[57]

Religion and philanthropy

Religion played a crucial role in many aspects of the school's public philanthropic image, with the Institution retaining links with local churches and clergy. The Annual Report for

[55] Summers, 'A home from home', pp.56-7.

[56] *The Cambrian*, 2 September 1864.

[57] Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, p.71.

1851 stated that, 'All ministers of religion in Swansea who are members of Society' had a role in the decision-making processes of the Committee.[58] The Institution's desire for respectable figures – the 'members of Society' – necessitated links with local clergy. Religion also acted as an important source of collection and advertising. Collections were made at churches, allowing the Cambrian Institution to get involved in local life. This provided a bond with other local Institutions and individuals, as seen in 1867 when the Committee was asked to participate in 'a simultaneous collection throughout the places of worship in the town for the various charities'.[59]

However, the question of religious affiliation also created power struggles and rifts in ideology. When Principal Alexander Melville left his position in 1862, His split from the organising Committee of the Institution was far from amicable. Two years earlier he had presented his report to the Committee, lamenting that the institution 'does not prosper, there must be an excuse for it, you have gone on in the old stereotyped way and it has proved a failure... Now I would most respectfully invite the Committee to put an end to the system which has worked them so little good.' Where usually these reports brought up routine matters of pupil numbers, illness and clothing supplies, here Melville voiced his dissatisfaction with the way that pupils were trained and the 'weak government' of the Institution.[60] He may well have had legitimate concerns about in-house disorganisation, but his conflict with the Committee ran far deeper than his initial speech suggested. In May 1862, he showed hostility to the Ladies' Committee, refusing them admission to the Institution

[58] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *The Fourth Annual Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea, for the year ending 30th June, 1851* (Swansea, 1851).

[59] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/3, MB 1867-87, 6 November 1867.

[60] WGAS, E/Cam 2, Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Principal's Reports 1860-76, 3 October 1860.

beyond a designated 'Committee Room'. The Committee decided that 'some of the expressions used by him were ungentlemanly and insulting', and asked Melville for an apology or a resignation.[61] After a meeting with the Committee, Melville resigned in June.[62]

The fallout continued well after his exit, revealing a religious element to the existing hostility. The Bishop of Llandaff sent a letter to the Committee explaining that Melville wished to set up another deaf school in Llandaff, as a result of his resentment at the religious composition of the Committee. 'Mr Melville', he wrote, 'complains of interference by members of this Committee with his religious teaching', citing the Unitarian element as the main obstacle.[63] The argument was played out through letters printed in Swansea's local newspaper, *The Cambrian*, a year later. The Committee insisted that only three Unitarians were present on a Committee of twelve, and no effort had been made to suppress religious differences 'till Mr Melville imagined or invented them.'[64] Melville insisted that his new school would not harm the Cambrian Institution but instead allow him to teach religion in the way he saw fit.[65] Yet for the Committee, the damage had been done. The Institution's Honorary Secretary, Rev. E. Higginson, resigned, dismayed at the 'sectarian jealousies interfering in this work of the purest benevolence' and 'damaging your subscription list in certain auxiliaries'.[66] Higginson and other Committee members saw this conflict of interests mostly as bad for business and reputation.

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[61] WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Minute Book (hereafter MB) 1855-66, 23 May 1862.

[62] WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 12 August 1862.

[63] WGAS, E/Cam 1/2, MB 1855-66, 1 Oct 1862.

[64] *The Cambrian*, 27 March 1863.

[65] *The Cambrian*, 3 April 1863.

[66] *The Cambrian*, 27 March 1863.

Attaching a denomination to the Cambrian Institution's public religious identity is difficult. It was primarily referred to as an Anglican institution, as its dealings with local clergymen and children's visits to churches were conducted at the Holy Trinity Church in Swansea, a Church of England institution. However, in other respects it was a diverse and non-denominational school. According to the *Post Office* directory of 1871, the Cambrian Institution Committee included members of Swansea School Board representing Unitarian, Baptist and Church of England interests.[67] As well as their myriad social, industrial and philanthropic pursuits, the Committee also displayed religious diversity. Melville's charges of bias towards Unitarianism on the Committee were met with puzzlement and criticism. This was the first instance of 'religious sectarianism' in the Institution, announced *The Cambrian*. 'It has been uniformly supported and managed by persons of all denominations acting in concert, without any difficulty, in the pure spirit of benevolence to the afflicted.'[68]

Indeed, by 1893 the *Quarterly Review of Deaf Mute Education* praised the manner in which the school 'seems to possess the confidence of different religious denominations, and to enjoy the support of all political parties.[69] Yet the presence of several denominations made in-fighting inevitable. The early Swansea School Board was marred by denominational rivalry, reflecting a general religious contest for education epitomised by the Cowper-Temple Clause of the 1870 Education Act, which allowed for withdrawal from specific religious teaching.[70]

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[67] *Post Office Directory of Monmouthshire and the Principle Towns and Places in South Wales* (London , 1871).

[68] *The Cambrian*, 27 Mach 1863.

[69] *The Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education*, 31:3 (1893), 195.

[70] Lorraine A. Cook, 'The contribution of nonconformity to elementary education in Swansea from the mid-Victorian era to the end of the nineteenth century', *History of Education*, 26:1 (1997), 51; G.W. Roderick, 'Education in an industrial society' in Griffiths, *City of Swansea*, p.182.

Religious divides, particularly between Anglicans and Nonconformists, had the potential to permeate the sphere of voluntary education and philanthropy in general.[71] The religious arguments breaking out amongst the elite of the Cambrian Institution therefore very much reflected a time of change, debate and tension amongst religious educational figures.

Yet the image that emerges from the Cambrian's records is very much one that rejected factionalism. In a letter from 1893, Principal Benjamin Payne made clear his dislike of the idea of separating children into denominations. He pointed out that uneducated children may well have been 'of no religious persuasion whatever'. An attempt to divide deaf schools by denomination would be 'virtually an attempt to sectarianise the Institutions': 'The religious question does not and ought not to affect Institutions.'[72] Payne's position is a fascinating one, for it links the question of denominationalism directly to the children's backgrounds and experiences, whilst revealing a seemingly ambivalent attitude towards the specifics of the Institution's religious profile. This position may have stemmed from personal taste or recognition of the potential implications for fundraising if the Institution aligned itself with only one form of Christianity. The Institution remained open to influence from various denominations despite being connected to the Church of England. The details are complex, but the centrality of religion to the philanthropic identity of the Cambrian Institution is undisputed.

Philanthropy and the construction of deafness

The Cambrian Institution, then, quickly constructed an image and identity based around philanthropic values. The profile which has emerged so far is distinctive and complex, but

[71] Trainor, 'Urban elites', 7.

[72] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 5/2, Principal's Letter Book (hereafter PLB) 1889-93, Letter from B.H. Payne to Joseph Hall, 31 January 1893.

very much fits with typical narratives of Victorian philanthropy, by way of its elite-centred Committee structures and roles for women and religious figures. The question remains of how its brand of philanthropy affected the lives of the pupils, and what change it had on social perceptions of deafness as a whole. This section will therefore explore philanthropy's role in the construction of deafness. The endless pursuit of funding by voluntary special schools necessitated turning deafness into a public spectacle. The Cambrian Institution needed to publicise its work in order to raise funds and attract interest both from wealthy philanthropists and local and national communities. This created a public philanthropic profile for the Institution based around duty, civic pride and the respectability of those involved. In turn, it also presented and spread a specific interpretation of deafness.

Nowhere was this more visible than in the public meetings, examinations and demonstrations held by the Cambrian Institution, in which the children were presented to the public and the carefully-constructed public image of the school's work was introduced to the attendees. D.G. Pritchard's 1963 work describes these demonstrations as 'distasteful' but 'the one certain way of raising money and obtaining publicity.'[73] More recently, Anne Borsay has explained how they created a 'spectacle' based on exaggerated accounts of the 'miracle' of deaf education.[74] She notes the importance of the sensationalist rhetoric in these demonstrations in constructing a public image of deafness, comparing the public meetings to freak shows built around the idea of 'otherness', firmly separating audience and subject.

The Cambrian Institution's public fundraising meetings permeated this spectacle. Pupils were brought on stage to be publicly examined, or sit tests in front of the audience. At the

[73] Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped*, p.29.

[74] Anne Borsay, 'Deaf children and charitable education in Britain 1790-1914' in Anne Borsay and Peter Shapely (eds.), *Medicine, Charity and Mutual Aid: the Consumption of Health and Welfare in Britain, c.1550-1950* (Aldershot, 2007), pp.73-9.

foundation meeting in Aberystwyth in 1847, the school's founders presented a 16-year-old pupil from the Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and a former pupil at the London Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor who was now employed in Aberystwyth as an 'excellent working engineer'. Both were asked questions through fingerspelling, which they answered on the blackboard, demonstrating what the reporter called 'the most satisfactory proof of the astonishing effect of culture upon the minds of those whom nature has deprived of so important an inlet to knowledge as a sense of hearing'. The demonstration as a whole was designed to contrast the importance of the school's work with the perceived tragedy of an uneducated deaf child. An attendee related this to the sense of duty which characterised the formation of the school: 'Although we cannot restore eyes to the blind and give speech to the dumb, yet it is our duty to relieve them.'[75]

The Annual Report of 1853 included 'testimonials' from a public meeting which help identify what was expected and appreciated at each demonstration. The headmaster of Swansea Grammar School was present that year, asking questions to the children about school subjects. After asking 'easy' questions for which the pupils had prepared, he 'thought it my duty to put a few general, or abstract questions on Language, to the Deaf and Dumb pupils. But it was no matter of wonder to me that they were not answered': the questions previously answered had been chosen specifically beforehand, and the children would likely only answer the questions for which they had prepared. The Vicar of Swansea also gave a testimonial, in which he praised 'the interest they appeared to take in the Religious and

[75] *The Welshman*, 5 February 1847.

Biblical questions proposed to them'. The demonstrations were carefully chosen to reflect what the Committee and the Principal wanted to convey, and to please specific interests.[76]

Amanda Bergen's work on the public examinations of deaf children, however, takes an alternative perspective which rejects a reading of them as oppressive, arguing that 'to see the examination purely in terms of the generation of publicity and funding is overly simplistic'.[77] Instead, she argues, they were a 'highly successful means of attracting a large and respectable audience' and, in a distinctive way, helped to introduce the concept of deaf education to the public.[78] Crucially, she points out that examinations in her case study of Yorkshire were attended by deaf people, and provided a meeting place for former pupils and deaf adults in the town.[79] Indeed, the Cambrian Institution played a central role in the social lives of both deaf adults and children in Swansea, and in Yorkshire, public examinations contributed to this. However, is difficult to discern what reactions the pupils themselves had, and the pupils of the Cambrian Institution may well have seen the examinations as a welcome respite from their school lives. However, Anne Borsay's work suggests that preparation for the demonstrations and the experience of being part of the spectacle may have been a source of anxiety for many children.[80] Reading the examinations as an overt display of oppression would indeed be an unfair conclusion to make; they were a complex phenomenon. However, it is important to recognise the images and messages of deafness being conveyed through them.

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[76] Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, *The Sixth Annual Report of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Swansea, for the year ending 30th June, 1853* (Swansea, 1853).

[77] Amanda Bergen, 'The public examination of deaf and blind children in Yorkshire, 1829-1890', *Northern History*, 41:4 (2004), 162.

[78] Bergen, 'Public examination', 161.

[79] Bergen, 'Public examination', 155.

[80] Borsay, 'Deaf children', 76.

The public demonstration of the 'miracle' of deaf education fed into the widespread philanthropic discourse of 'saving' deaf children from a life of ignorance and poverty. Philanthropists, including those involved in work for deaf children, frequently portrayed themselves as what Neil Pemberton has called 'slum savers' or 'adventurers of "Darkest England".'[81] The rhetoric of saving children or observing their lives extended far beyond deaf children – Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) provided perhaps one of the most vivid examples of the social investigator discovering uneducated dwellers of the street, analysing them and comparing them against the respectable majority.[82] Lydia Murdoch's work argues for melodrama as a crucial element of Victorian popular philanthropy, providing a narrative and characterisation to its subjects which was often far removed from their actual lives.[83] Perhaps the most revealing indication of these attitudes at the Cambrian Institution's public meetings came when *The Welshman*'s reporter declared 'the advantages to be derived by persons who before they were thus taught, differed little from the beasts of the field.'[84] This was a clear and outspoken plea to the audience: without education, the deaf child was reduced to savagery.[85]

The link between uneducated deaf children and savagery was one of the most vivid examples of philanthropy being used to create publicity through an exaggerated construction of deafness as the 'other'. Martha Stoddard Holmes has outlined the idea of physical disability as

[81] Neil Pemberton, 'Deafness and holiness: home missions, deaf congregations, and natural language: 1860-1890', *Victorian Review*, 35:2 (2009), 69.

[82] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: Charles Griffin and Company, 1851).

[83] Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick, NJ), p.7.

[84] *The Welshman*, 5 February 1847. This quotation refers to the articulation demonstration at the meeting, and takes the viewpoint that deaf children's only route out from savagery is speech.

[85] This point is argued in Borsay, 'Deaf children', p.79.

'melodramatic machinery' in the books and stage melodramas of the Victorian era: she finds disabled characters (with Tiny Tim as the quintessential example) frequently used as vehicles for intense emotion: the reader or viewer is asked to feel sympathy and concern for the afflicted characters.[86] Holmes' research also highlights the importance of literary and symbolic readings of Victorian disability in nonfictional texts. This includes *London Labour and the London Poor*, which she argues regularly used the stereotype of the afflicted, helpless disabled street performer or seller, whilst sometimes ignoring this overt emotion. Holmes' work draws the association of disability with melodrama which, she argues, has resulted in disability becoming 'emotional shorthand' in modern culture as well.[87]

The Cambrian Institution's public meetings were texts with their own emotionally-informed constructions of what it meant to be a deaf child, utilising the literary tropes of melodrama and pity which Holmes identifies. The 1863 Annual General Meeting, for example, decried the 'painful spectacle of wretchedness' that was the uneducated deaf child.[88] The meetings were also a form of entertainment, a place for the general public to examine and discuss the children. *The Cambrian* in 1866 recognised this and drew the distinction between public examinations and general Committee meetings: 'the public... do not care to attend the annual meeting where the proceedings are of a formal and less interesting character.'[89] Some press reports even portray the examinations as rich in comedy value: at 1868's meeting the

[86] Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor), 2004, pp.2-4. It is important to point out that many see both tensions and overlaps between conceptions of deafness and disability. See, for example, Mairian Scott-Hill, 'Deafness/Disability: Problematising Notions of Identity, Culture and Structure' in Sheila Riddell and Nick Watson (eds.), *Disability, Culture and Identity* (Harlow, 2003), p.89.

[87] Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction,* pp.192-5.

[88] *The Cambrian*, 11 September 1863.

[89] *The Cambrian*, 5 October 1866.

audience was 'kept... in roars of laughter' by pupils imitating doctors and shoemakers: 'those present were not only interested and pleased at seeing the educational progress made by the pupils, but kept in the merriest mood by the various manipulations of the children.'[90] Demonstrations of deaf education were therefore identified as a valuable draw of public attention.

Holmes' call to examine the literary and emotional power of Victorian disability is therefore essential for understanding the public identity of the Cambrian Institution. By acting as a form of entertainment, public meetings arguably had some features in common with the Victorian freakshow, a viewing space for deafness and a forum for the ways it could supposedly be cured.[91] They were carefully constructed and orchestrated to provide a pre-defined narrative. At one demonstration in 1849, the Committee wrote to the headmaster of the Birmingham Institution requesting that they 'send a Boy in the advanced class of their Institution to accompany Mr Rhind, the Principal, in his intended tour throughout South Wales.' When they declined, Rhind reluctantly took two of his own pupils with him.[92] This was a widespread process, as many schools used pupils from other institutions or local cases.[93]

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[90] *The Cambrian*, 2 October 1868. Boyce notes that this reaction also featured in demonstrations of the Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. Boyce, *History of the Yorkshire Residential School for the Deaf*, p.18.

[91] See Fiona Whittington-Walsh, 'From Freaks to Savants: Disability and Hegemony from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1939) to Sling Blade (1997)*, *Disability and Society*, 17:6 (2002), 695-707. Borsay also draws this link. Borsay, 'Deaf Children', p.77.

[92] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 1/1, Minute Book 1847-55, 21st April 1849.

[93] The Yorkshire Institution for the Deaf and Dumb's first demonstration featured a pupil from the Manchester Institution and a local deaf man with five deaf children. Anthony J. Boyce, *The History of the Yorkshire Residential School for the Deaf, 1829-1979* (Doncaster, 1990), p.2.

The spectacle of the Cambrian Institution's public demonstrations firmly cast deafness as separate from the norm. The disabled or deaf body was identified as tragic and in need of help.[94] By presenting deaf children to the public and conveying helplessness and affliction, they were distanced from the benevolent philanthropists seen to help them. Borsay describes this as a 'double-edged sword' effect, in which compassion was offered, but only in a way which exploited and exaggerated the children's bodily deviations from the norm.[95] Much later in the Institution's life, the stage-managed theatricality of these demonstrations seemed to irritate principal Benjamin Payne, who rejected the Committee's idea of a 'programme of exhibition' for the 1903 meeting, potentially reflecting a broader decline in the public display of deaf children: 'They are proper for performances,' he complained, 'not examinations.'[96]

Conclusion

The finance and publicity of the Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was organised and administrated by a small Committee comprised of influential and sometimes (but by no means exclusively) wealthy people, with far-reaching connections across the country. Voluntaryism was at the heart of the Cambrian Institution even after the introduction of state legislation for deaf children in the late nineteenth century. The Institution prided itself on its position as Wales' only (or later, largest) deaf school and placed great emphasis on the benevolence of its philanthropists. This charity in effect kept the Institution afloat: the Cambrian Institution appreciated the financial gains and publicity which came from being associated with the town's social elite. It also benefitted from the national networks of

[94] We are reminded here of Lennard Davis' outstanding theory on disability and 'normalcy'. See Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995).

[95] Borsay, 'Deaf Children', p.77.

[96] Swansea, WGAS, E/Cam 5/5, PLB 1903-6, Letter from B.H. Payne to Joseph Hall, 1st December 1903.

funding which they created. Yet recent historiography has cast a questioning eye on Victorian philanthropists' claims to selfless humanitarianism. Many were undoubtedly lured by the social status and religious credentials which came with a position on the Committee. The philanthropists also introduced a complex series of political and religious connections into the school which, as seen in the conflict between Principal Alexander Melville and his Committee, could create tension and hostility amongst each other.

The decisions made by these philanthropists may not always have affected the children's day-to-day lives, but they set the foundations for life at the school and established the social environment of the Institution. Perhaps most importantly, philanthropists shaped public perceptions of the deaf children and of deafness itself. The publicity material of the Cambrian Institution presented its inmates as helpless and tragic figures struggling with an affliction that denied them access to religion or society at large. This vision of the deaf child was permeated through Annual Reports and newspaper articles, and most explicitly at public demonstrations, which symbolised the social position of the children as objects of pity and spectacle. Most importantly, every decision made by the Committee, no matter how small or inconsequential, affected the children in some way, whether directly or as a product of the attitudes being fostered. Moreover, the issues highlighted in this article remind the historian of the potential gulf between the profile of the Institution disseminated to the public and the actual day-to-day activity which took place there.