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Learning, Law, and Religion: Higher Education and Welsh Society, 1540-1640 (University of Wales Press - Studies in Welsh History)

W. P. Griffith

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This text provides a study of the impact of Renaissance and Reformation scholarship on Welsh society and its leading members. It aims to show how broadly disseminated this scholarship was in a part of the Kingdom of England which was often regarded as remote and backward. In the absence of its own civic and court traditions, Wales depended heavily on English educational institutions. The entry into the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and into the Inns of Court in London of over 2500 Welsh students between 1540 and 1640 represented a significant commitment to the acquisition of learning. It also made the Welsh the most distinct and also most accepted of the non-English elements at these places. However, they preserved their separate identity to a marked degree, aided by special patterns of educational endowments. Higher education offered the Welsh student the opportunity to share in a wide experience of Western European intellectual scholarship. It also offered career openings for Welshmen which are examined in some detail. The differences to emerge between north and south Wales are a particular feature of this study, especially in the context of the production of an educated clergy to serve the emergent Reformation Church in Wales. Equally, the manner in which higher learning gave opportunities for careers in England, particularly in the law, are also examined in detail. Finally, the study recounts the impact of higher learning on patterns of public administration in Wales and on the country's cultural life. The relationship of this learning to the intellectual activities of the gentry, clergy and lawyers is described, especially the growth of bookish interests and the assimilation of these groups into a milieu of "high culture".

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