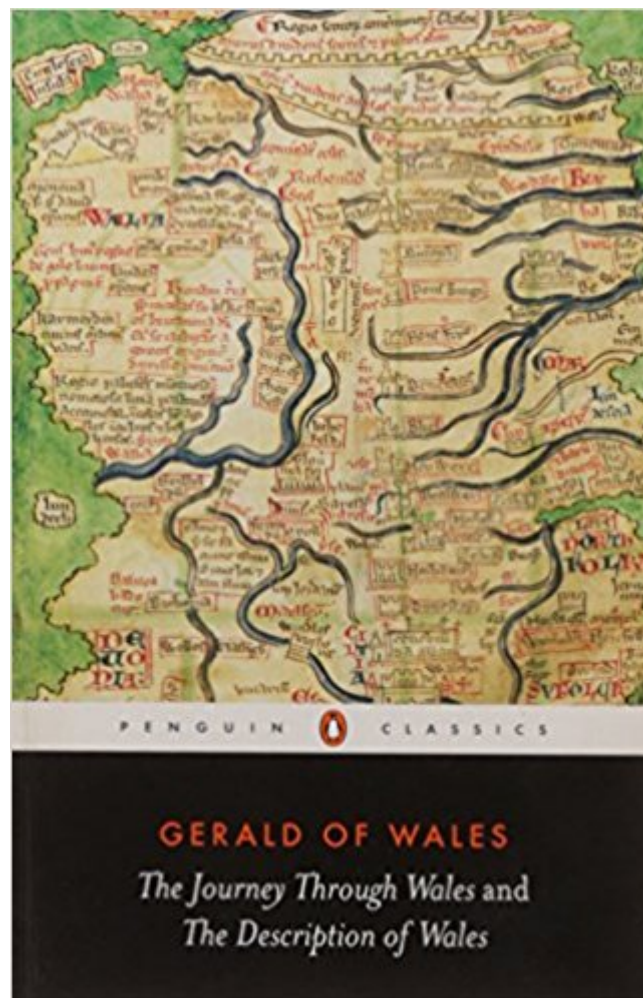




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# The Journey Through Wales And The Description Of Wales (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

Scholar, churchman, diplomat and theologian, Gerald of Wales was one of the most fascinating figures of the Middle Ages and *The Journey Through Wales* describes his eventful tour of the country as a missionary in 1188. In a style reminiscent of a diary, Gerald records the day-to-day events of the mission, alongside lively accounts of local miracles, folklore and religious relics such as Saint Patrick's Horn, and eloquent descriptions of natural scenery that includes the rugged promontory of St David's and the vast snow-covered panoramas of Snowdonia. The landscape is evoked in further detail in *The Description*, which chronicles the everyday lives of the Welsh people with skill and affection. Witty and gently humorous throughout, these works provide a unique view into the medieval world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Latin

Gerald of Wales was born c.1145 in Pembrokeshire. He died in obscurity, possibly in Lincoln in 1223. He wrote seventeen books, all of them in Latin, and was well-connected to the Royal Family of his day. Lewis Thorpe was Professor of French at Nottingham University from 1958 to 1977. He was President of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society. He died in 1977.

This is a fascinating little book which the translator has done an excellent job of putting in general

context with other works, not only in the introduction and appendices but also in the extensive footnotes tracing quotations. Gerald was quite clearly a fan of Roman literature (Virgil, Lucan, Horace, etc) and he clearly saw the Welsh, as did Geoffrey of Monmouth, as a part of some ancient Trojan extension of culture. This book contains two of Gerald's writings. The first is *The Journey Through Wales*, which I found very easy to read, and which basically recounts a trip around Wales preaching and performing Mass. Each area is described in substantial detail and often historical episodes or accounts of relics of saints are interspersed in the text. Some of these accounts have clear pagan origins meaning that students of Celtic prehistory as well as of the Middle Ages may find much material in here to ponder. Of course separating Catholic from Pagan elements is not very easy, but I have no doubt it could be done. At any rate that synthesis is what made Medieval Wales into what it was. The second part is *The Description of Wales*, which describes the geography and people of that country. The first part of that book describes all that is noble. The second part describes all that is not. It ends with a prediction of how the English will probably eventually conquer Wales, and what can be done to keep up a resistance. I found this book to be quite a bit drier than *The Journey Through Wales*, but it could be of interest to many people nonetheless. Despite the dry portions of the second work, I decided to give this work 5 stars because the first work brings Wales to life so vividly and provides so much material for consideration that this book really should be on the top of the reading list for anyone interested in Wales and/or the middle ages. Highly recommended.

I had read about this book elsewhere and had not come across it myself. It is very good, and although somewhat dated in language, very interesting and well written. Of course, you must keep in mind the "prejudices" of medieval writers, and be aware going in of church and other politics.

Great

First, I want to say thank you, wherever he is today, to Mr. Jones, himself a Welsh patriot, for recommending this book to me nine years ago. What these two books (collected in one volume) are is an invaluable resource that takes a reader on a village-by-village, region-by-region tour of 12th century Wales. Gerald, a Benedictine monk in royal service, had a scholarly eye and a novelist's touch in describing what he encountered on his trips thru the westernmost nation on the island of Britain. Gerald tells of a Wales still independent from England, still Celtic and very much a fiercely independent state in its own right. He describes the hair styles, clothing, dining preferences,

architecture, religious and historical sites (including a legend of the burial place of one King Arthur) and does it in a way that never loses the spark of immediacy, even for those of us centuries in Gerald's future. This book reads a lot like a piece from National Geographic, only it's nine-hundred years old! Without Gerald, we never would get to meet so many interesting human beings who once lived out lives in a time and place far removed from where we dwell today. This descriptive memoir is an improbable survivor, and a treasure in the collective library of the human race.

Although the original language of these works was Latin, they should be on the curriculum in secondary education in Wales (as far as I can tell they aren't), as they are Wales's substitute for England's "Domesday Book". To date there are no Welsh versions, and, indeed, only one Welsh patriot of my acquaintance has ever heard of them! Gerald (correctly de Barri, but nobody called him that), born about 1145, and archdeacon of Brecon in the diocese of St. David's, was part of the Norman infiltration into Wales. His other surviving works are also in Latin. Nevertheless, he was born in Wales and was probably a Welsh speaker. These posthumous editions by cricket-loving Lewis Thorpe are exhaustive in contextualising the contents, not only historically, but also in identifying the often very brief classical allusions of the well-read author (one that Thorpe perhaps thought not worth commenting on is Gerald's assertion: "From time immemorial Wales has been divided into three more or less equal parts" ("Description..." book 1 chapter 2)). There are numerous evocative geographical descriptions, with accompanying anecdote, so much so, that the purpose of the "Journey....", to accompany the archbishop of Canterbury, Baldwin, in a fundraising tour for the 3rd Crusade in 1188, is more or less lost. I have the reprint of 2004, which has part of a 13th century English map on the cover. A later edition has a manuscript illumination of a scribe. Very nice, but not nearly as apposite. The interest of Gerald's Welsh portfolio goes far beyond the purely local. I bought it to use the "Journey...." as a yardstick for the likely limit of a day's itinerary at the same period in Spain, for which it has been endlessly useful. It has many such uses. Perhaps the most surprising element is Gerald's comments on music. The Welsh predilection for the harp might be expected, but the extent of its use at such an early date in an unrefined environment is a revelation. Even more so is Gerald's assertion that, whereas the English could only manage singing in two parts, the Welsh could do it in several. As a cathedral canon he would know what he was talking about, but does any multi-part music from the 12th century actually exist? As far as I know, Gerald's travelogue is unique, in pre-18th century literature, in, precisely, its wealth of topographical descriptions. Would that somebody had done the same for the Crusades. The "Journey..." and the "Description...." must also be of value to translators. Thorpe's texts are fluent and idiomatic, and

devoid of anachronisms. However, there is no modern edition of the Latin originals, much less parallel text versions. If you want Gerald's actual words (and his Latin is very good), you have no option but the editions of 1868 which are the basis of Thorpe's translations. You won't find them on station bookstalls, not even at Llandudno Junction.

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