Preface

Habent sua fata libelli. Books have their vicissitudes. This dictum has once again proved to be true. The story behind the present volume is complicated and long-winded. A Celtic scholar from Ireland once planned a voluminous *Compendium linguarum celticarum* where all insular Celtic languages, including their various historical stages, would be represented. He asked, among others, the authors of the volume in hand to contribute. After a few years, the present editor asked what had become of their contributions. The Celtic scholar from Ireland answered that he had given up his plan because, supposedly, the Goidelic authors were not willing to cooperate. At the same time he suggested that somebody else should take over the project on a reduced scale in order to preserve what had been written already. The chapters written so far, all about Brythonic, were precisely the ones assembled in the present volume. So, willy-nilly, the present editor decided to proceed.

Among the chapters about Brythonic, the only one missing at the time was the one about Modern Welsh. Even after a considerable lapse of time, the author chosen by the original editor was not able to deliver his chapter. The same happened with another author chosen subsequently. After much time had been wasted in futile efforts to find an author for Modern Welsh, the editor finally decided to do the volume without it, in order not to postpone the completion of the work even further. It seems indeed that among the languages and stages of languages treated in the book, a chapter about Modern Welsh could most easily be dispensed with. There is no lack of reliable descriptions of Modern Welsh. The editor feels that the chapters now included in the volume represent a useful and balanced collection.

Since the present editor had to take over a project designed by somebody else, a certain heterogeneity in method and make-up between the individual chapters may have resulted. But this might not necessarily be a disadvantage. Three of the five chapters are in English, two in German. This is also due to the original design. The Celtic scholar from Ireland asked the two German-speaking authors (one Austrian, one German) explicitly to write their contributions in German, because that would give the volume a more international appearance and would, in addition, allow the editor to apply for subsidies from German institutions. Be that as it may, the two authors followed the request and wrote their respective chapters in German. After the change of editorship, the original reasoning was no longer valid. But since the chapters had already been completed at that stage, both authors thought, independently of each other: *quod scripsi scripsi*. It is indeed a frustrating task to translate into a second language something one had conceived in another.

The editor is very glad that the project has finally reached a happy conclusion. He is most grateful to his co-authors for not having given up and for having updated their contributions after a long period of time. He is also very grateful to the publisher for her great patience and understanding and for having in the end speeded up the completion of the work. Finally, he would like to thank Peter Schrijver for including the volume in *Münchner Forschungen zur historischen Sprachwissenschaft* and for his assistance during the making of this book.

Hamburg, March 2011 Elmar Ternes

Table of Contents

Preface v
Table of Contents vii
Contributors xix

Old British (Peter Schrijver) 1

Abbreviations 1
1. Chronology and early development 2
2. Sources 5
2.1 Old Welsh 5
2.2 Old South-West British 8
3. Phonology and spelling 11
3.1 The vowel system between Early Proto-British and the early emergence of West- and Southwest-British (c. 100-800 A.D.) 11
3.2 The development of the vowel system from Early Old Welsh to Late Old Welsh (ca. 800-1100) 15
3.3 The Old Welsh vowel system (800-1100): spelling and origins 17
3.4 The development of the vowel system in Old South-West British (c. 800-1100) 20
3.5 The Old South-West British vowel system (ca. 800-1100): spelling and origins 22
3.6 Diphthongs: spelling and origin 23
3.6.1 The *u*-diphthongs 23
3.6.2 The *i*-diphthongs 26
3.7 Other developments of the vowels 29
3.8 Development of the consonant system 30
3.9 Developments during the Old British period 34
3.10 Spelling, origin and development of individual consonants 35
3.11 Prothesis and epenthesis 40
3.12 Stress 41
4. Morphology 41
4.1 Morphophonology 41
4.2 The noun 41
4.3 The adjective 44
4.4 Degrees of comparison 44
4.5 Adverbs 45
4.6 Numerals 46
4.7 Pronouns 47
4.7.1 Personal and possessive pronouns 47
4.7.2 Demonstrative and anaphoric pronouns 53

4.7.3 Interrogative and indefinite pronouns 54
4.7.4 Other pronouns and pronominals 55
4.8 The article 56
4.9 The verb 56
4.9.1 The verb: present indicative 57
4.9.2 The verb: imperfect indicative 61
4.9.3 The verb: present and past subjunctive 62
4.9.4 The verb: preterite and pluperfect 64
4.9.5 The verb: imperative 66
4.9.6 The verb: nominal forms 67
4.9.7 The verb 'to be' 68
4.9.7.1 Present and imperfect indicative 68
4.9.7.2 Present and past subjunctive 70
4.9.7.3 Preterite and pluperfect / secondary future 71
4.9.7.4 Other forms 72
4.10 Irregular verbs 72
5. Syntax 72
5.1 Verbal syntax 72
5.2 Relative clauses 74
5.3 Negation 75
5.4 The particle *-(t)* 76
Texts 77
References 79

Mittel- und Frühneukymrisch (Stefan Schumacher) 85

1. Allgemeines 85
2. Die Quellen 87
2.1 Dichterische Quellen 87
2.2 Prosaquellen 93
2.3 Handschriften und diplomatische Editionen in elektronischer Form 95
2.3.1 Handschriften im Internet 95
2.3.2 Diplomatische Editionen in elektronischer Form 96
3. Phonologisches System und Orthographie 96
3.1 Das System der Vokalphoneme und die Orthographie der Vokale 96
3.2 Die Konsonantenphoneme 100
3.3 Orthographie der Konsonantenphoneme 101
3.3.1 Orthographie der labialen Konsonanten (/p/, /b/, /v/, /f/, /m/, /mʰ/, /w/) 101
3.3.2 Orthographie der dentalen Konsonanten (/t/, /d/, /θ/, /s/, /ð/, /n/, /n:/, /nʰ/, /r/, /r:/, /rʰ/, /l/, /ɬ/, /l:/) 102
3.3.3 Orthographie der velaren Konsonanten (/k/, /g/, /ŋ/, /ŋʰ/, /x/) 104
3.3.4 Orthographie der übrigen Konsonanten (/j/, /h/) 104

4. Phonologie und diachrone Veränderungen 105
4.1 Betonung, Länge bei Vokalen 105
4.1.1 Betonung 105
4.1.2 Länge bei Vokalen 106
4.2 Zusammenfall von akymr. *ɔu*, *oʉ* und *ou* in /eʉ/; Rundung /i/ > /ʉ/ in labialem Kontext 107
4.3 Umlaut und Vokalmutation 107
4.4 Mittelkymrische Vokalassimilation 109
4.5 Monophthongierung und andere Veränderungen in Auslautsilben mehrsilbiger Wörter 110
4.6 [ə] als Allophon von /a/ vor Nasal 111
4.7 Betontes /ʉːx/ > [ʉux] 111
4.8 Zusammenfall von akymr. /ṽ/ und /β/ in /v/ 111
4.9 Anlautmutationen 112
4.10 Provektion und andere Assimilationsprozesse, Delenitionserscheinungen 113
4.11 Sandhierscheinungen 116
4.12 Vokalprothese 118
4.13 Vokalepenthese und Vokalisierung 119
4.14 Schwund von Konsonanten und sonstige Veränderungen 122
4.14.1 Schwund von Approximanten 122
4.14.1.1 Schwund von /w/ 122
4.14.1.2 Schwund von /j/ 123
4.14.2 Schwund von stimmhaften Frikativen 124
4.14.2.1 Schwund von /v/ 124
4.14.2.2 Schwund von /ð/ 125
4.14.3 Schwund von /h/ und Deaspiration 126
4.14.4 /-nt#/ > /-n#/, /-mp#/ > /-m#/, /-ŋk#/ > /-ŋ#/ 127
4.14.5 Zusammenfall von /nː/ und /n/ bzw. von /rː/ und /r/, /ŋn/ > /n/ 127
4.15 [xw], [hw] 128
4.16 Dialektale Unterschiede 129
5.1 Morphonologie 129
5.2 Substantiv: Genus, Numerus, Determination 129
5.2.1 Genus 130
5.2.2 Numerus 130
5.2.3 Determination 133
5.2.4. Syntaktischer Genitiv 133
5.3 Morphologie des Adjektivs 133
5.3.1 Von Adjektiven abgeleitete Adverbien 134
5.3.2 Steigerung 134
5.3.2.1 Äquativ 134
5.3.2.2 Komparativ 135
5.3.2.3 Superlativ 136

5.3.2.4 Unregelmäßige Steigerung ... 136
5.4 Zahlwörter ... 137
5.4.1 Kardinalia ... 137
5.4.2 Ordinalia ... 138
5.5 Pronomina ... 139
5.5.1 Personal- und Possessivpronomina ... 139
5.5.1.1 Unabhängige Personalpronomina ... 139
5.5.1.2 Klitische Objektpronomina ('infigierte' und 'suffigierte' Pronomina) ... 140
5.5.1.3 Possessivpronomina ... 143
5.5.1.4 Flektierte Präpositionen, d.h. Präpositionen mit suffigierten obliquen Personalpronomina ... 144
5.5.2 Demonstrativpronomina ... 147
5.5.3 Relativsatzkonstruktionen ... 148
5.5.3.1 Das Relativum als Subjekt oder Objekt ... 148
5.5.3.2 'Unechte' Relativsätze: Präpositionale, genitivische, adverbiale etc. Relativsätze ... 151
5.5.3.3 Reste eines älteren Systems für präpositionale Relativsätze ... 151
5.5.4 Interrogativpronomina ... 152
5.5.4.1 Präpositionale Interrogativsätze ... 153
5.5.4.2 *pieu* ... 154
5.5.5 Indefinitpronomina ... 154
5.5.6 Übrige Pronomina und Pronominalia ... 155
5.6 Verbale Morphologie ... 155
5.6.1 Das regelmäßige Verb; Bemerkungen zum Impersonale ... 156
5.6.1.1 Indikativ Präsens ... 157
5.6.1.2 Indikativ Imperfekt: ... 160
5.6.1.3 Präsens des Konjunktivs ... 161
5.6.1.4 Imperfekt des Konjunktivs ... 162
5.6.1.5 Präteritum ... 163
5.6.1.6 Plusquamperfekt ... 165
5.6.1.7 Imperativ ... 166
5.6.1.8 Beispielparadigma eines regelmäßigen Verbs: *gadu* 'lassen', Stamm *gad-* ... 167
5.6.2 'Verba contracta', *sag*-Verben ... 168
5.6.3 'Augment' ... 168
5.6.3.1 Resultative Funktion ... 169
5.6.3.2 Potentielle Funktion ... 170
5.6.4 Verhalten des verbalen Komplexes ... 170
5.6.4.1 Das syntaktische Verhalten von Verba simplicia im frühen Mittelkymrischen ... 171
5.6.4.2 Das syntaktische Verhalten von Verba composita im frühen Mittelkymrischen ... 173
5.6.5 Verbalnomen ... 176

5.6.5.1 Produktive Morpheme: *-i*, *-aw*, *-u* 176
5.6.5.2 Unproduktive oder begrenzt produktive Morpheme 177
5.6.5.3 Unterscheidung Simplex – Kompositum 178
5.6.6 Verben mit Resten starker Stammbildung 178
5.6.6.1 *s*-Konjunktiv 178
5.6.6.2 Ablautende Präterita 178
5.6.6.3 *t*-Präteritum 181
5.6.6.4 Stark gebildete Impersonal-/Passivformen des Präteritums: 182
5.6.6.5 *mynet* ‘gehen’ 183
5.6.6.6 *dyfot* ‘kommen’ 186
5.6.6.7 *gwneuthur* ‘tun, machen’ 188
5.6.6.8 *bot* ‘sein’ 190
5.6.6.9 *gwybot* ‘wissen’ 196
5.6.6.10 *atnabot* ‘kennen’ 197
6. Syntax 198
6.1 Verbale Kongruenz 198
6.2 Syntax von Prosatexten 200
6.2.1 Syntax des positiven Aussagesatzes 200
6.2.2 Periphrasen mit *gwneuthur* ‘tun, machen’ 202
6.2.3 Syntax von Relativsätzen 203
6.2.4 Syntax des negativen Aussagesatzes und des Nebensatzes 203
6.3 Syntax poetischer Texte 204
6.4 Syntax von *bot* ‘sein’ 204
6.4.1 *bot* als Kopula bei indefinitem Prädikatsnomen; Nominalsätze 204
6.4.2 Definites Prädikatsnomen 207
6.4.3 Syntaktische und morphologische Gemeinsamkeiten bzw. Unterschiede zwischen der Syntax von *bot* + Prädikatsnomen und der Syntax von *bot* + Adverbialphrase 207
6.4.3.1 *(y) mae* und zugehöriges; Partikel *y(d)* /ə(ð)/ + Formen von *bot* 207
6.4.3.2 Mit *yd-* /əd/ erweiterte Formen von *bot* 210
6.4.3.3 Wichtige Anwendungsbereiche von *bot* + Adverbialphrase (1): Periphrastische Verbalformen 211
6.4.3.4 Wichtige Anwendungsbereiche von *bot* + Adverbialphrase (2): die Konstruktion mit prädikativem *yn* 213
6.4.4 bot als Verb der Existenz 214
6.4.5 Verwendung von *bot* zum Ausdruck des Besitzes 215
6.4.6 Weitere besondere Formen von *bot* 216
7. Lexikon 217
8. Anhang: Texte des Mittelkymrischen 220
8.1 Mittelkymrische Prosa 220
8.1.1 Der Prolog zu den Gesetzen 220
8.1.2 Die Einleitung von *Culhwch ac Olwen* 222
8.1.3 Eine mittelkymrische Übersetzung eines biblischen Textes 224

8.2 Mittelkymrische Dichtung 225
8.2.1 Ein Gedicht aus dem Buch von Aneirin 225
8.2.2 Ein Gedicht aus dem Buch von Taliesin 226
8.2.3 Ein frühes *Gogynfeirdd*-Gedicht 228
Bibliographie 230
1. Diplomatische Ausgaben und Textausgaben: 230
2. Sekundärliteratur: 231

Middle and Late Cornish (Nicholas J.A. Williams) 237

1.7 Cornish phonology and computers 239
2. Orthography and phonology 241
2.1 Orthography 241
2.2 Phonology 241
2.3 The Cornish Prosodic Shift 242
3. The long vowels 244
4. Short stressed vowels 254
5. Vocalic alternation 258
6. Diphthongs 262
7. Unstressed vowels 266
8. Consonants 272
9. Pre-occlusion 282
10. The assibilation of *t* and *d* 288
11. Cornish in East Cornwall and the Prosodic Shift 291
12. The Prosodic Shift and its effects: summary 298
12.3 Long vowels: 300
12.4 Short vowels: 300
12.5 Alternation <y ~ e> 300
12.6 Diphthongs 300
12.7 Consonants 301
12.9 Word stress 302
13. Dialect in Cornish 303
14. Morphology 304
14.1 Initial mutations 304
14.2 Soft mutation or lenition 304
14.3 The spirant mutation or spirantisation 305
14.4 The hard mutation or provection 306
14.5 Mixed mutation 306
14.6 Anomalous mutations 307
15. Nouns 307
15.2 Plurals 307
15.7 Adjectives 308
15.9 Degrees of comparison 309

16. Adverbs 310
17. Pronouns 311
17.5 Demonstrative pronouns 313
17.6 Other pronouns 313
17.9 Interrogatives 314
17.10 Prepositions 315
Numerals 318
17.16 Cardinals 318
17.18 Examples of the cardinals 319
17.19 Examples of the ordinals 319
18. Verbs 320
18.2 The verbal noun 320
18.3 The present-future 321
18.4 The imperfect 322
18.5 The preterite 322
18.6 The conditional 322
18.7 The present and past subjunctive 322
18.8 The second person imperative 323
18.9 The third person imperative 323
18.10 The first person plural imperative 324
18.11 The verbal adjective 324
18.12 Passive 324
18.13 The reflexive 325
18.14 Loss of *i*-affection 325
18.15 Verbal paradigms 326
18.16 'To be' 326
18.17 *y'm bues* 'I have' 327
18.18 'To do' 329
18.19 'To wish' 330
18.20 'To go' 330
18.21 'To come' 331
18.22 'To be able' 331
18.23 'To know' 332
18.24 'To carry' 332
18.25 'To give' 333
18.26 'To bring' 333
18.27 Causatives in *-he* 333
18.28 Verbs of obligation 334
18.29 Defective verbs 334
19. Syntax 334
20. Lexicon and word-formation 340
21. Neo-Cornish 343
Texts 349

References 353
Appendix: maps 356

Middle and Early Modern Breton (Peter Schrijver) 359

Abbreviations 359
1. Chronology 359
2. Middle Breton sources 360
3. Middle Breton metrics 365
4. Phonology and spelling 367
4.1 Vowels 367
4.2 Vowels: examples and remarks 368
4.3 MB *au* > *ao* > /ɔ/ 371
4.4 Vowel sequences 371
4.4.1 Diphthongs: examples and remarks 373
4.5 Non-syllabic allophones of /u/, /y/ and /o/ 376
4.6 /i/ and /j/ 377
4.7 Secondary vowel affection 378
4.8 Consonants 378
4.9 New lenition and the loss of postconsonantal *h* 380
4.10 The opposition between /u/ and /v/, /ṽ/, /f/ 380
4.11 Consonants: examples and remarks 381
4.12 Origin and development of MB *zr, zl, zn* 386
4.13 Stress 386
5. Morphology 387
5.1 Morphophonology: the initial mutations 387
5.2 Morphophonology: vowel affection 388
5.3 The noun 389
5.3.1 Gender 389
5.3.2 Number 389
5.4 The adjective 391
5.4.1 Gender and number 391
5.4.2 Comparison 392
5.5 Adverbs 392
5.6 Pronouns 393
5.6.1 Personal pronouns 393
5.6.2 Personal pronouns suffixed to prepositions 395
5.6.3 Demonstrative pronouns and particles 397
5.6.4 The article 398
5.6.5 Interrogative pronouns 399
5.6.6 Other pronouns and pronominals 399
5.7 Numerals 400
5.7.1 Cardinals 400

5.7.2 Ordinals 400
5.7.3 Other numerals 400
5.8 The verb 401
5.8.1 The verbal system and the endings of the regular verb 401
5.8.2 Semantics 402
5.8.3 History of the system 403
5.8.4 Endings: peculiarities 404
5.8.5. Irregular verbs: to be 405
5.8.6 Irregular verbs: to have 406
5.8.7 Irregular verbs: 'to know' and other compounds of 'to be' 407
5.8.8 Irregular verbs: to go and to come 410
5.8.9 Irregular verbs: to do 411
5.8.10 Irregular verbs: 'to say' 412
5.8.11 Periphrastic constructions 413
6. Syntax 414
6.1 Syntax of the noun 414
6.2 Syntax of the adjective 414
6.3 Syntax of the sentence 415
6.3.1 Verbal particles: non-negative 415
6.3.2 Verbal particles: negative 416
6.3.3 Particles in subordinate clauses 416
6.3.4 Syntax of 'to be' 417
7. Vocabulary 418
8. Early Modern Breton (EMoB) 419
Texts 421
References 426

Neubretonisch (Elmar Ternes) 431

0. Methodologische Vorbemerkungen 431
1. Terminologisches 431
2. Periodisierung des Neubretonischen 432
3. Geographische Verbreitung 434
4. Soziale Stellung, Sprecherzahl 436
5. Dialekte 439
6. Phonetik und Phonologie 445
6.1 Vokale 445
6.2 Konsonanten 447
6.3 Distribution 449
6.4 Wortakzent 450
6.5 Sandhi 451
7. Orthographie und Standard 453
8. Morphophonologie 458

8.1 Konsonantische Anlautmutationen ... 458
8.1.1 Mutationsbedingungen ... 459
8.1.1.1 Lenition ... 460
8.1.1.2 Spirantisierung ... 461
8.1.1.3 Provektion ... 462
8.1.1.4 Gemischte Mutation ... 462
8.1.1.5 Nasalmutation ... 463
8.2 Einschub von Konsonanten (Liaison) ... 463
8.3 Konsonantische Alternationen im Stammauslaut ... 464
8.4 Umlaut ... 465
8.5 Dissimilation ... 465
8.6 Suppletion ... 465
8.7 Akzentverlagerung ... 466
8.8 Auslautverhärtung ... 466
8.9 Quantitätswechsel von Vokalen ... 467
8.10 Sandhi ... 467
9. Morphologie ... 467
9.1 Substantiv ... 467
9.1.1 Genus ... 467
9.1.2 Numerus ... 468
9.1.2.1 Singular - Plural ... 469
9.1.2.2 Dual ... 470
9.1.2.3 Kollektiv ... 471
9.2 Adjektiv ... 472
9.3 Pronomen ... 473
9.3.1 Personalpronomen ... 473
9.3.2 Interrogativpronomen ... 473
9.4 Flektierte Präpositionen ... 473
9.5 Numeralia ... 474
9.5.1 Kardinalzahlen ... 474
9.5.2 Ordinalzahlen ... 475
9.6 Verb ... 476
9.6.1 Infinite Formen ... 476
9.6.1.1 Verbalnomen ... 476
9.6.2 Finite Formen ... 478
9.7 Wortbildung ... 481
9.7.1 Komposition ... 481
9.7.2 Derivation ... 481
9.7.2.1 Präfixe (in Auswahl) ... 481
9.7.2.2 Suffixe (in Auswahl) ... 482
10. Syntagmatik ... 483
10.1 Das nominale Syntagma ... 483
10.1.1 Artikel ... 483

10.1.2 Demonstrativa 484
10.1.3 Possessiva 484
10.1.4 Numeralia 486
10.1.5 Attributive Adjektive 486
10.1.6 Genitivkonstruktion 487
10.1.7 Satzeinbettung 488
10.1.8 Das adjektivische Syntagma 489
10.2 Das verbale Syntagma 490
10.2.1 Reflexiv und reziprok 490
10.2.2 Die Auxiliarkonstruktion 490
10.2.3 Negation des Verbums 491
10.2.4 Zusammengesetzte Tempora 492
10.2.5 Passiv 493
10.2.6 Verlaufsform (Progressiv) 493
10.2.7 Pronominales Objekt 493
10.2.8 Präpositionen 495
10.2.8.1 Verbindung mit einem Substantiv 495
10.2.8.2 Verbindung mit einem Pronomen 496
10.2.8.3 Verbindung mit dem Verbalnomen 497
10.2.8.4 Semantische Besonderheiten von Präpositionen 497
11. Syntax 498
11.1 Wortstellung im Satz 498
11.2 Verbalpartikeln 500
11.3 Der selbständige Satz 501
11.3.1 Substantivisches Subjekt 501
11.3.2 Pronominales Subjekt 503
11.4 Imperativsätze 505
11.5 Sätze mit "sein" 505
11.6 Negation 506
11.6.1 Substantivisches Subjekt 506
11.6.2 Pronominales Subjekt 507
11.6.3 Sätze mit "sein" 507
11.7 Fragesätze 508
11.7.1 Wortfragen 508
11.7.2 Satzfragen 508
11.7.3 Antwort auf Satzfragen 508
11.8 Topikalisierung 509
11.9 Komplexe Sätze: Parataxe und Hypotaxe 511
11.9.1 Koordinierende Konjunktionen 511
11.9.2 Unterordnende Konjunktionen 511
11.9.3 Komplexe parataktische Konstruktionen 512
11.9.3.1 Aneinanderreihung 513
11.9.3.2 Präpositionalphrasen mit Verbalnomen 513

11.9.3.3 Partizipialkonstruktionen 514
11.9.3.4 Absolute Konstruktion 514
11.10 Sätze ohne flektiertes Verb 514
11.10.1 Narrative Konstruktion 514
11.10.2 Setu 515
11.10.3 Erstarrte Verbformen 515
12. Wortschatz 515
12.1 Keltische Wörter 516
12.2 Lateinische Wörter 517
12.3 Französische Wörter 518
Texte 520
A Der Sämann (Mt. XIII, 1–9) 520
B Jakez Riou (1899–1937) 520
C Anjela Duval (1905–1981) 521
D Jean-Pierre Calloc'h (1888–1917) 523
Literaturverzeichnis 525
Anlagen: Karten 529

Contributors

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Nicholas J. A. Williams was born in London. He read Classics, English and Celtic in Oxford, and received a PhD in Celtic from Queen's University, Belfast. From 1976 he taught Irish in University College, Dublin, retiring in 2007 as Associate Professor emeritus in Celtic Languages. He has written widely on Irish, Manx and Cornish. His Cornish translation of the Bible will appear in 2011.