The Welsh of Patagonia are a special subgroup of the Welsh who have settled in Australia. Their motivations for emigration from Wales were rooted in their opposition to the English, who traditionally persecuted the Welsh for their language and for their cultural and religious beliefs. The Welsh looked abroad as a means to ensure the longevity of their culture. In 1865, after protracted negotiations with the Argentine government, keen to claim Patagonia as its own, the first 153 Welsh landed on the beaches of what is now Puerto Madryn. Situated near the mouth of the Chubut River, their settlement is now a province of Argentina. Glyn Williams outlines in great depth the history of the settlement in his book *The Desert and the Dream*. Using cooperative farming techniques, the Welsh specialised in growing wheat and lucerne under irrigation conditions. The only other inhabitants of the region were the local Indians, and the encounters between the Welsh and the Indians have passed into family folklore.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Welsh settlers and their descendants in Patagonia numbered approximately 4000 but, for a variety of reasons, many were tempted to emigrate to other countries, including Canada and Australia. The shortage of land within the Chubut Valley, periodic flooding, unreliable markets, the increasing force used by the Argentine government to ensure that the Welsh were educated in Spanish and became full citizens of their adopted country, and the requirement that the young men serve two years of military training, all contributed to a general desire to relocate.

The Australian states, especially Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, as well as the Commonwealth government on behalf of the Northern Territory, vied with one another for these highly desirable skilled British irrigationists. As many had the potential of possessing considerable capital after the sale of their Patagonian properties, they were regarded at the time as ideal immigrants. Advertising material was sent through the agents-general in London and government representatives made the trip to Argentina to entice the Welsh to Australia. In their turn, the Welsh Patagonians sent scouts to spy out the land, hoping to take up a number of farming blocks together in order to maintain some sense of community and identity.

One group of 42 arrived in Fremantle on board the *Seydlitz* in October 1910, comprising the families of Evans, Griffiths, Roberts, Humphreys and Owens. They were later joined by the large Hughes family who had diverted to Wales to part with family and who arrived on board the *Bremen* in July 1911. The land promised by the West Australian government proved inadequate and the group took up land owned by the Midland
Railway Company in the Moore-Miling district, north-east of Perth. The area was known to the locals first as 'Gwalia Valley' and then, to avoid confusion with Gwalia on the goldfields, as Nardy or simply 'the Welsh settlement'. Ultimately, however, the settlers left their farms because of the coincidence of poor weather and lack of resources.

A second and much larger group initially took up 13 farms 'reserved for Welshmen of Chubut' at Colando near Leeton between 1912 and 1916 as part of the New South Wales government Murrumbidgee Irrigation Scheme. Having developed their own techniques through taming the flood waters of the Chubut River, they were keen to acquire farms suited to the growing of lucerne. Members of extended families emigrated together and in general the families were large. Few spoke any English on arrival. The names Edwards, Rowlands, Jones and Lloyd Jones, Williams, Thomas and Coslett, Thomas, Oliver and Roberts were common in the district. Initially lured by exaggerated claims of the productivity of the land, 11 disenchanted Welsh Patagonians later joined others in giving evidence in two Royal Commissions into the administration of the scheme, the first in 1915 under Commissioner A. C. Carmichael, the second in 1916–17 under Commissioner Judge Bevan. Having been granted compensation, they had to surrender their holdings.

Some moved to Victoria to join yet another small group of Welsh Patagonians in Lockington, Baramin and Rochester.

A third group was attracted by promises of land in the Northern Territory and arrived on the Titanic Mere in Darwin in July 1915. They included the Davies family, consisting of Edward, his 3 adult sons, 2 daughters-in-law and 14 grand-children, along with the Williams, Brunts and a Kent. The arrival of this group, along with some 200 Argentinians of mixed ethnic backgrounds (mostly Spanish, Russian and Italian), caused a minor outcry. Given the timing of their arrival, during the First World War when immigration was almost totally suspended, and given their predominantly non-British racial composition, their welcome was less than warm. They were for a time employed on railway construction work at Pine Creek but most gravitated to the cane fields of north Queensland in search of work or ended up in Leeton with their countrymen.

Other non-farming Welsh Patagonians also arrived whose motivations for migration are not so clear. These include the Roberts family who returned to Wales for 12 years and then migrated to Sydney in 1912, and the Thomas family who arrived in Melbourne in 1913.

The experience of these Welsh Patagonian immigrants mirrors that of many land settlers in the early decades of the twentieth century who were encouraged to take up land under the official policy of settling the 'empty spaces' of the Australian continent. Although some individuals were successful, many through inexperience, insufficient capital or the marginal quality of the land were not. Titles and subtitiles of books written about this period reflect this, for example The Limits of Hope (Marilyn Lake, 1987) and A study of desperate hopes (Michael Roe, 1995). The story of the Welsh Patagonian migration is unique, however, although their numbers were small. It was, in the first place, a double migration experience and, in the second, it was a form of colony migration where a number of families migrated as a group in order to preserve their distinctive cultural heritage. Their identity was not just Welsh but Welsh Patagonian having dwelt for so long in a foreign country, they had come to regard themselves almost as a separate race. Although the Welsh and Spanish languages may no longer be spoken by the Welsh Patagonian families and their descendants, and their discrete communities in Australia have largely disappeared over time, the folklore of their links to a distant land of South America is still very much alive.

PETR ROBERTS AND MICHELE LANGFIELD