

RIGHT, WRONG, STILL OPEN

What Sikes claimed and what became of it. The short version: the collection held and the argument did not.

What he claimed	Verdict	Why
The tales and customs are genuine	SUSTAINED	Later Welsh collectors, working in Welsh, found the same material. This is the part of the book still worth using.
The fairies fall into five kinds	NOT A FINDING	Sikes's own arrangement, not a Welsh distinction — and repeated in English ever since as though it were one.
The death-portents form a coherent system	SUSTAINED	The corpse-candle, the cyhyraeth, the gwrach y rhibyn and the tolaeth do hang together. Much of it is Edmund Jones's Monmouthshire, a century earlier.
His sources are adequately given	NOT SUSTAINED	Condemned within a decade by Rhŷs and Hartland. He names a source once and then stops marking it, so a reader cannot tell 1780 Monmouthshire from the country he lived in.
The customs of Book III are worth recording	SUSTAINED, AND BETTER THAN HE KNEW	The one Book where he is consistently an eyewitness — and he never says so, so his own testimony sits at the same weight as his borrowings.
The sin-eater was a Welsh custom	STILL DISPUTED	He prints the denial as well as the claim, which is the most creditable thing in the volume. No sin-eater has been identified by name with contemporary documentation.
The Pontypridd rites are Druidic	NOT SUSTAINED — AND HE WATCHED THEM	They were begun in about 1853 by Myfyr Morganwg, a living Welsh romantic, in a tradition invented by Iolo Morganwg. Sikes dated as ancient a revival younger than he was.
The fairies are a memory of an aboriginal race	NOT SUSTAINED	No evidential support, and the assumptions about race and conquest inside the theory are worth seeing rather than passing over. The rival theory — hiding Druids — fares no better.
Stone-worship survives in the wells and stones	NOT SUSTAINED	The wells, the pins and the practices are real and still studied. The explanation offered for them is not, and this is the material most easily checked, because it has dates.
The survivalist method itself	ABANDONED	A custom's meaning is not its origin. The school that assumed otherwise did not outlast the century by much.
This is a book about Wales	TRUE, WITH A LARGE QUALIFICATION	191 southern county mentions to 36 northern. The Welsh-speaking north-west is barely here. Ask which Wales; the answer is usually the south-east.

From British Goblins by Wirt Sikes, Valice Classics 16. Free at valicepress.com/companion/british-goblins