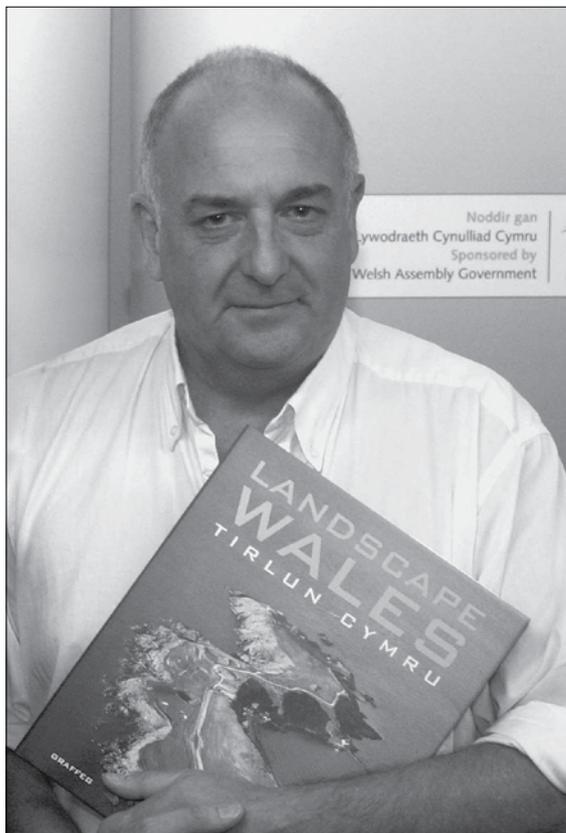


Annual General Meeting



Lloyd Jones

During these last few years the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Books Council has been held in the autumn. At this meeting Friends are given the opportunity to listen to Professor M Wynn Thomas, present chair of the Books Council, in conversation with a renowned author. It is the custom to invite Welsh-language and English-language authors in alternate

years, and at our meeting on 13 October 2007 our guest was the award-winning English-language author Lloyd Jones, who won the Book of the Year 2007 prize for his novel *Mr Cassini* (Seren). Lloyd Jones, now of Llanfairfechan, can be described as a former farmer, newspaper editor and lecturer, giving some indication as to how entertaining the session in his company turned out to be.

Mr Cassini, like Lloyd Jones's first novel *Mr Vogel* (Seren), draws heavily on the author's own life experiences, which he willingly shared with the audience. He wrote *Mr Vogel* after undertaking a thousand-mile journey on foot around Wales following his battle with alcoholism. In *Mr Cassini* he tries to recover the lost years of his childhood as the protagonist searches the myths of the past in order to fill the gaps in his memory. The audience was taken from tears to laughter and back again as Lloyd Jones told his story and the tale of his novels.

Earlier in the day members of the steering committee had met under the chairmanship of Tegwyn Jones. After receiving reports on the membership and financial situations the committee discussed ways in which the Friends could offer practical support to the work of the Books Council. It was decided that the officers should discuss the matter with the officers of the Books Council, with a view to submitting a formal proposal to the next Annual General Meeting.

From the Chair

Tegwyn Jones



Although I am far indeed from being an expert on the Annual Reports of public bodies, I would find it very difficult to believe that the Welsh Books Council's Annual Report, published towards the end of last year, could be bettered. It is a thoroughly professional document. Presentation-wise it is elegantly and colourfully set out, while the contents can only serve to gladden the heart of any Welsh person worth his salt. In the reports of both the Chairman and the Director, and under the various headings – 'Grants', 'Editing', 'Design', 'Distribution, Sales and Marketing', and so on – one is aware of an enthusiasm born of success and which reflects the dedication and sheer hard work of all those concerned with the Council's work. Our privilege as Friends is to congratulate the Welsh Books Council on another successful year in promoting every aspect of the book and periodical market in Wales, and to resolve at the same time to redouble our efforts to recruit more Friends into our ranks. This is an industry of key importance which deserves every possible support.

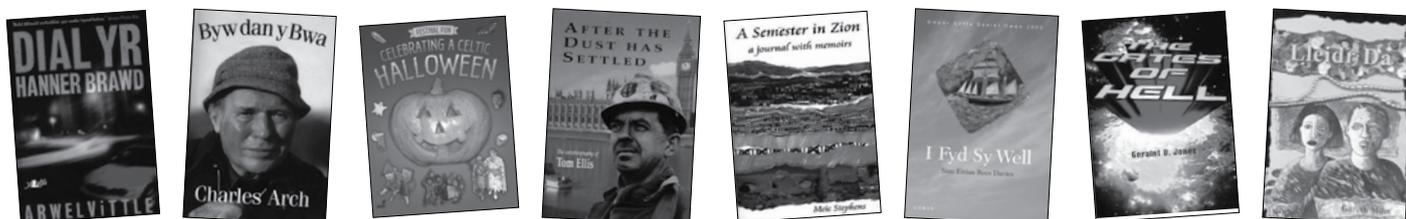
Annual Book Sale

The Books Council is again holding a book sale during March and April, and we enclose a copy of this year's catalogue for your perusal.

We would like to thank the publishers for producing such an interesting list of titles, which are all offered at half price or less – a real bargain for book lovers! There is an excellent selection of books for children and adults, in both Welsh and English.

'Our members appreciate the inclusion of the annual sale list in their information pack,' said Tegwyn Jones, Chair of the Friends, 'and this is certainly one of the benefits of being a Friend.'

Although booksellers may not be able to display the full range of titles available, they will be more than happy to order copies on your behalf. Happy Reading.



My Favourite Books

Members of the Friends are invited to present their favourite books. Here is Chris Thomas's choice.



Chris Thomas

Choosing one's favourite books is a highly subjective matter and it is with some trepidation that I put forward my selection, in the full knowledge that it will only really appeal to others of a similar literary taste. Storyline doesn't matter so much to me: it's the quality of the language employed that's important for my personal enjoyment of a book. Not being able to speak or read Welsh (I've tried, believe me, I've

tried! For nearly sixty years I've tried), perpetually regretting the loss of the richness of meaning of which the Welsh language is capable is a sterile pastime when I can always reach for one of my favourite authors to soothe the cares of life. Two of them are at the top of the list and are read time and time again even though the stories are so familiar there are no surprises or revelations left.

My first choice would be among the works of Jeffrey Farnol, who had a superb mastery of language; the other author is Jack Vance, a more modern writer who specialises in speculative fiction and who has the same fluency of prose, with the addition of being able to make the zaniest of human social concepts and interactions not only understandable but also surprisingly rational. It is difficult to be pointedly selective in the works of either author but in Jeffrey Farnol's case I would recommend *Beltane the Smith*, *The Loring Mystery* or *Martin Conisby's Vengeance* if you'd like to experience a beautifully smooth flow of words to transport you into an old-fashioned world of lyrical interludes and civilised passions, with a healthy dollop of *Boy's Own* action thrown in for good measure.

The works of Jack Vance are beyond my meagre powers of description, so I'll chicken out and say they're of the same superlative standard as those of Jeffrey Farnol. As examples I would strongly advise one of the 'Demon Princes' series, the 'Planet of Adventure' series or *The Eyes of the Overworld*. It helps if you're a science fiction buff – but you don't have to be – to enjoy reading about the different factions our present society could have evolved into, though some may say they're not that much different from some of the crazy sub-societies and cultures with which we share this poor battered old Earth right now.

I've desperately tried to emulate the style and quality of these great writers in my own literary efforts with only mediocre success, therefore after a brief period of publishing my own work and that of others, I gave up producing printed books in favour of e-books to go on the Internet: one must move with the times after all, unfortunately. My advice, therefore, to all aspiring authors, for what it's worth, is simple: never give up and if you don't succeed in getting published by a mainstream publisher – do it yourself!

D Philip Davies Head of Information Services

It is possible that some are still intrigued by the fact that the Welsh Books Council makes so much fuss about the gwales.com website. After a conversation with D Philip Davies, Head of the Information Services Department, who is responsible for the service, I will never even think of asking such a question again.

'Within gwales.com there is a huge database of information about books from Wales. It includes information about the availability of published volumes as well as information about books that have not yet been published. This database is the foundation for nearly every aspect of the Council's work, as it works with its various partners to develop the book industry in Wales,' says Phil. 'I cannot overemphasise the importance of correct and current information to the industry.'

Phil has worked for the Books Council for twenty years and has been in his present post of Head of the Information Services Department for two of those.

'In 1996 I was involved in setting up the internal bibliographic database which now, through gwales.com, provides all manner of information and services for booksellers and publishers, libraries and the public, as well as supporting the work of the Books Council's own Distribution Centre and its sales representatives.

'It is this database that allows the Distribution Centre

to offer its overnight service to shops and booksellers. This means that orders for books can be delivered on the next working day, offering a level of service which is among the best available.'

Phil speaks with a strong commitment to the work for which he and his staff are responsible. He also speaks as someone who has a deep passion for books.

'I have to admit that I'm mostly a non-fiction person. I'm very fond of reading biographies, especially political ones, and you'll also find a pile of poetry books at my bedside. On the whole, the only novels that I read are those which other people recommend to me.

'As the father of two daughters I'm so pleased that they have come to enjoy reading as well. Now, they suggest books for me to read, and there is nothing I enjoy more than sitting around the dinner table with everybody talking enthusiastically about the latest book they're reading.'

The Information Services Department is responsible for the content of all Books



D Philip Davies

Council websites, including the Welsh Book Trade Info site (www.wbti.org.uk), which was developed to provide a comprehensive source of information about the publishing industry.

'Dependable information is essential for the book world and it's my job to ensure that the Books Council provides that information in a way which is accessible and useful to all who need it.'

National Year of Reading 2008

a unique celebration of books and reading



2008 National Year of Reading Launch

On 13 March, the 2008 National Year of Reading was launched by Jane Hutt, Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. During the launch, which took place in Cardiff Bay, she set a challenge for the nation – to organise 2,008 events during the Year to celebrate the power of the written word and the joys of reading. To mark the occasion, the Minister presented over eight thousand books to

disadvantaged groups throughout Wales. Representatives of the library authorities of Wales and some of their mobile libraries were present to receive the books on behalf of their respective areas.

The Books Council has been invited by the Welsh Assembly Government to coordinate the Year of Reading and, in addition to galvanising the support of a multitude of partners from all sectors, the Council will also be organising three major projects. During early summer, there will be a nationwide campaign aimed at getting thousands of people to give books to each other as gifts. In early autumn, a number of reading communities will organise a host of book-based activities for a period of four to six weeks. Throughout the year, sports teams and personalities will be encouraged to visit schools and libraries to share their love of reading with children and young people, thus harnessing the motivational power of sport to promote reading and literacy.

The Year of Reading will aim to amplify the range and diversity of the literacy-based work that is already undertaken by schools, libraries, adult learning centres, prisons, trade unions, businesses and many other organisations. In addition, it will provide a unique opportunity to promote the power of reading to change the lives of individuals and communities.

For the coordinators, the National Year of Reading presents an immense challenge; for the nation, it provides a unique opportunity to celebrate the joy of reading.

Blwyddyn Darllen GENEOLAETHOL
2008
NATIONAL Year OF Reading

Awards for Welsh Publishers



Full house at the National Library

Representatives from the publishing industry came together to Aberystwyth last November to honour the winners of the Publishing Trade Awards, which were presented in the presence of Rhodri Glyn Thomas, Minister for Heritage. The Awards ceremony was held at the National Library as part of the Library's centenary celebrations.

The event was organised by the Welsh Books Council and a total of 18 awards were presented to the bestsellers in various categories, for books published in 2005 and 2006. Awards were also presented for the most borrowed library books,

English-language Winners

FICTION BESTSELLER

Parthian

The Colour of a Dog Running Away
Richard Gwyn

NON-FICTION BESTSELLER

Crown House

Imperfectly Natural Woman,
Janey Lee Grace

POETRY BESTSELLER

Seren

Letter to Patience, John Haynes

CHILDREN'S BESTSELLER

Gomer

The Midwinters, Julie Rainsbury

MOST BORROWED LIBRARY BOOK

Accent

Secrets, Lynne Barrett-Lee

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Seren

Cecil and Noreen, Patrick Corcoran

ILLUSTRATED BOOK

Seren

Return Yn Ôl, Rhodri Jones

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION (CHILDREN)

Pont Books

Dark Tales from the Woods, Daniel Morden

BEST CHRISTMAS 2007

COVER DESIGN

Seren

Blue Sky July, Nia Wyn

(For the Welsh-language winners, see the Welsh section of this newsletter)

as well as for design and production.

'The ceremony was an opportunity to acknowledge the work of publishers in Wales and to honour the winners in each category,' said Gwerfyl Pierce Jones, Director of the Welsh Books Council. 'The awards reflect the wide range of books published in Wales today as well as the high standards of production.'

Rhodri Glyn Thomas also paid tribute to the individual publishers: 'It was an honour to be present to acknowledge the work of Welsh publishers. We have a strong literary tradition here in Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government is pleased to support the publishing industry and to help provide books of the highest quality for future readers.'

The Parthian Carnival

Parthian publishes a wide range of novels, stories, plays and poetry by writers from Wales and beyond. We feel that our books reflect a diverse contemporary Wales based around stories and perspectives from writers who are looking out to or write about a wider world. Niall Griffiths is currently researching a book about being a 'Ten Pound Pom', looking at his childhood experiences as a migrant to Australia, we have just published Roger Williams's play *Mother Tongue* about minority world languages, and George Brinley Evans's evocative memoir, *Where the Flying Fishes Play*, recounts his journey as a young man from Banwen in the Welsh coalfields to the rivers of Burma in the Second World War.

We publish books that we like and enjoy, and try to convince other people to read them. Parthian was established in Cardiff in 1993 by Richard Davies and Gillian Griffiths, with initial support from the Prince's Youth Trust. The first novel published, *Work, Sex and Rugby*, went on to win a World Book Day award and has become one of the best known novels of contemporary Welsh life, while we have expanded to publish over 150 books and establish the Library of Wales series.

The company moved from Cardiff to west Wales in 2003 and, further to investment from the Welsh Books Council and the Welsh Assembly Government, we were joined by Dominic Williams as marketing and sales director, Lucy Llewellyn as design and new writing editor, and the writer Lloyd Robson as international project editor, all of whom have established and developed our links with Trinity College, Carmarthen.

We feel that it is also important to seek links outside Wales; our European connections with agencies and publishers in Milan, Paris and Barcelona have enabled Welsh writers to be translated into a number

of languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Danish, Turkish, Arabic and Russian. Three of our writers have benefited from being Scitture Giovani fellows with the Hay festival and in 2008 Cynan Jones, who won a Betty Trask award for his novel *The Long Dry*, set on a farm in Ceredigion, will be taking part in a literature exchange programme which will take him to Germany, Turkey and Italy. This carnival of voices aims to be collaborative; we have always published novels translated from Welsh and now we are beginning to publish work in translation from a range of European languages. Our first was Jordi Coca's prizewinning Catalan novel *Under the Dust*, while this year we will be publishing novels translated from Basque, German and Spanish.

As publishers we feel that it's necessary to engage with the wider world through publication and research, and to develop opportunities for writers to explore their ideas and voices. A good example would be the Robert Mitchum Project with Lloyd Robson. Lloyd has written a number of books set in the south Wales milieu, such as *Cardiff Cut* and *Bbboing* but is about to publish a book called *Oh Dad! A Search for Robert Mitchum*, which has entailed three years of research around the east coast of the United States.

Projects such as 16/24 for new writers and the Cambrensis Initiative helped us to develop the careers of young writers such as Rachel Trezise and Matthew David Scott.

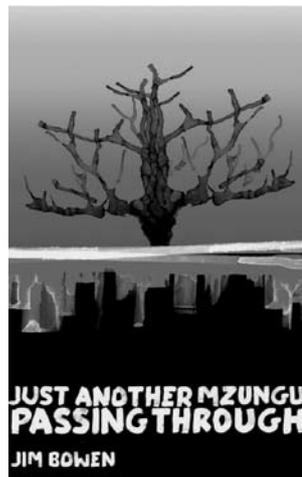
Over the last three years Parthian has also been busy with establishment of the

PARTHIAN

Library of Wales series under the editorship of Dai Smith. The series now comprises 17 titles, including classics such as Raymond Williams's *Border Country* and *A Man's Estate* by Emyr Humphreys. It has been supported by the Welsh Books Council and the Welsh Assembly Government, and received an enthusiastic endorsement from Rhodri Morgan, who contributed a foreword to the *Sport* anthology, when he commented, 'The Library of Wales is one of the best things we've done as a government ...'

But moving away from the politics of literature and back to the core of Parthian, being enthusiastic about the books we publish, as part of a National Year of Reading initiative we are about to launch bookclubwales.co.uk, which will aim to encourage book clubs to read novels such as Caryl Lewis's award-winning Welsh novel *Martha, Jack and Shanco* and new fascinating fiction such as a first novel called *Just Another Mzungu Passing Through* by Jim Bowen, which is a

compelling story about a young teacher trying to come to terms with life in Kenya as a Mzungu (white man). The website will include resource material, author interviews and insights into recent Welsh novels. Please log on. Or write to us at Parthian for further details: Parthian, Trinity College, Carmarthen SA31 3EP parthianbooks@yahoo.co.uk



World Book Day 2008 gets the National Year of Reading off to a flying start!

World Book Day, which was celebrated on 6 March, had added significance this year. The Books Council, with the enthusiastic support of its partners, including schools, libraries, the book trade and a whole range of organisations, celebrated the Day with the same vivacity as in previous years, but this particular World Book Day also provided the launch pad for the National Year of Reading.

The annual lecture was delivered by renowned author Stevie Davies at the Wales Millennium Centre, Writing Squads across Wales held 'Meet the Author' days and, in partnership with Welsh Video Network, many secondary school pupils talked to authors in a series of video conferences. Messages of support were received from numerous Welsh celebrities; Colin Jackson,

Catrin Finch, Stephen Jones and Jane Oliver appeared on promotional posters.

Eight new titles were published in the Quick Reads/Stori Sydyn series and the 2008 authors include Colin Jackson, Scott Quinnell, Caryl Lewis and Bethan Gwanas. In Wales, the scheme is the fruit of a partnership between the Welsh Books Council and Basic Skills Cymru, with the support of the Welsh Assembly Government, and aims to provide fiction and other good reads for emergent adult readers. A total of 22 titles have so far been produced under this initiative.

A legacy of the last National Year of Reading (1998-1999), World Book Day continues to go from strength to strength, offering ever-increasing opportunities to highlight books and the pleasures of reading.



Stevie Davies (left) with Jane Hutt