

## New Director for the Welsh Books Council



Elwyn Jones and  
Gwerfyl Pierce Jones

Elwyn Jones has been appointed as the Welsh Books Council's next Director to succeed Gwerfyl Pierce Jones. Elwyn will take up his position on 1 November.

Elwyn's roots are in Bala, north Wales. He worked for the Urdd and PR company StrataMatrix before taking up a marketing position with the Welsh Books Council in 1997. Since 2002 he is the Head of Administration and Public Relations at the Welsh Books Council.

Gwerfyl has been the Director of the Books Council for twenty-two years and is only the second director, following Alun Creunant Davies.

Elwyn Jones said: 'It will be a great honour to succeed Gwerfyl and I look forward to working with our partners to develop the publishing industry in Wales and to build on the success of recent years.'

### From the Chair

Tegwyn Jones



It was as usual an exciting experience to be present in the Book of the Year event at the Hay-on-Wye Festival again this year, when the Welsh and English short lists were announced, and when there was an opportunity to hear the authors, who were short-listed, talking about their work. And bearing in mind that the six books were selected from a wide range of worthy volumes published during the year, we can only marvel at the great developments that have taken place in the world of book publishing in Wales during recent times. If one person deserves the plaudits for this, then surely Gwerfyl Pierce Jones is that person. She will shortly be stepping down from her post as Director of the Welsh Books Council, and will be the first, I know, to claim that this success story is down to good team-work. True, she has the support of an excellent team, but from the moment she was appointed to her post in 1987, she has been an inspiring captain. It was her determination from the outset to pursue – doggedly and undeviatingly – her clear vision that has made the Welsh Books Council what it is – one of our foremost national institutions whose contribution to our language and culture is a vast one. It is a privilege to thank her, and to wish her a long, happy and busy retirement.

## Membership Campaign

Your invitation to join the

*Friends* of the

WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL

The Friends association of the Welsh Books Council has around 400 members at present and this year we are eager to increase the membership. Our aim is to achieve a membership of 500.

The Steering Committee has therefore launched a membership campaign and we feel that the best way of explaining the aims and benefits to potential

members is by word of mouth.

We have produced a new membership form and enclose two copies for your attention in order to encourage friends and colleagues to become members.

May we thank you in anticipation of your co-operation.

Lyn Léwis Dafis  
Secretary

# My Favourite Books

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



M. Wynn Thomas

'Miniver Cheevy, born too late,' wrote Edwin Arlington Robinson. As I grow older, I know myself to be of his tribe, a cultural orphan, the belated, misshapen product of the dead cultures of Welsh Nonconformity and industrial south Wales. This has made me partial to the blithely past-less poetry of Walt Whitman, the ultimate celebrant of the eternal newness of the now. But it has made me even more susceptible to texts pungent with the lingering scent of lost worlds.

Cavafy's lifelong poetic mourning

for a long-lost Hellenistic Alexandria; Allen Tate's tortured tribute, in his novel *The Fathers*, to an Old South fatally compromised by its devotion to the evils of slavery; Isaac Bashevis Singer's *In My Father's Court*, a wry memorial to the brutally obliterated Jewish culture of Mittel Europa: all these move me. But most potent of all is Lampedusa's capture, in his great novel *The Leopard*, of the sensual languor and melancholy hauteur of the aristocratic class of feudal Old Sicily. Its elegiac opulence is captured by Visconti in his film version of the novel, but he misses the stringent complexity of its reconstruction of an irrecoverable world.

And the Welsh equivalent of *The Leopard*? For me it is unquestionably Emyr Humphreys's *Outside the House of Baal*. Centered on the enigmatic character of an old minister, it shares the Italian novel's scepticism about its own nostalgia. Selfless saint to some, monstrous egotist to others, JT is the summation of so much that was best, and no doubt some of what was worst, in patriarchal Welsh chapel culture.

An exceptionally moving scene is the one where, driven to the edge of emotional breakdown by the insufferable dawning of the nuclear age, he struggles in old age with the new technology of a

tape recorder to send a tearful message to distant relatives in North Dakota. Much more than his trials with the machine, the real obstacle to communication is the dated language of an outworn faith into which JT automatically lapses, as he is painfully aware: "We are bound into the same family by the bonds of love. You know I am a preacher so you will not blame me for preaching ..." Words fail him as he is overcome with emotion.'

But words fail the ageing JT in any case, as he repeatedly discovers that his language has no meaning for the young generation. A brashly importunate seaside photographer, armed with a pigeon as his prop, fails to understand JT's allusion to the dove of the Holy Spirit. Yet the old man struggles to persist in forgiving a morally and spiritually errant Wales just as his favourite prophet, Hosea, had forgiven his adulterous wife. A compressed version of the novel's extended meditation on moral crisis is found in Roland Mathias's poem 'Brechfa Chapel', another of the 'touchstone' texts of my personal experience. Given my beginnings, it isn't difficult to situate myself in a landscape in which an 'intolerable shilly/ Shally of birds' raucously harries 'the conversation of faith'.

## Got time for a Quick Read?

This year, the popular Quick Reads series has something to appeal to everyone with eight new titles published, four in Welsh and four in English. With all the books in the series priced at a credit crunch defying £1.99, it's a chance to pick up a good read at a great price.

The English titles offer four very different reads, including a love story from Catrin Collier, the autobiographies of footballer Andy Legg and swimmer David Davies, and the gritty true life stories of inmates from a south Wales prison.

In *Alive and Kicking*, footballer Andy Legg talks about his footballing career and how his life was turned upside down by cancer twice. The life of the swimming sensation David Davies is captured in *In at the Deep End, From Barry to Beijing*, as he explains how his interest in swimming as a child turned into an Olympic dream becoming a reality at the Beijing Games in 2008.

If it's love stories that interest you, then let Catrin Collier take you back to 1911 and to Tonypany where a young Welsh girl and an Irish worker battle against the odds to be together. The fourth title is a collection of true life stories by inmates at Parc Prison, Bridgend, as they recount their lives and the events that lead them all to the same fate.



2009 Quick Reads Welsh covers

The four Welsh titles also provide a variety of good stories. *Peter Moore: Y Gwaethaf o'r Gwaethaf* (The Worst of the Worst) is a chilling account of the north Wales serial killer Peter Moore, as well as the murder of Lynette White in Cardiff. *Bywyd yn y Coalhouse: Y Teulu Griffiths* (Life in the Coalhouse: the Griffiths family) follows Cerdin and Debra Griffiths and their children

Steffan, Angharad and Gethin as they travel back in time to 1927 as part of the popular BBC television series, *Coal House*. The life and career of the young footballer Owain Tudur Jones who played for Swansea is captured in *Fyny Gyda'r Swans* (Up with the Swans), whilst *Ar Ben y Byd* (On top of the World) follows the life and career of Ospreys and Wales winger Shane Williams, including last year's triumphs and winning IRB Player of the Year 2008.

A promotional campaign led by Cambrensis Communications secured media attention for the eight books in the Welsh and English media. With the series containing a mixture of stories and biographies by well-known authors and personalities, the books were well received in many fields. From *Wales this Week* to *Sgorio* on television, *Jonsi* and the *Cant y Cant* quiz on the radio, and extensive coverage in the *Western Mail*, *Daily Post* and *Y Cymro*, the Quick Reads series received a warm welcome by the media in Wales.

# Promoting Books from Wales



Bethan Jones

No sooner had MGA begun working with the Welsh Books Council to publicise English-language titles from Welsh publishers to the UK press, than the literary editors at the

*Daily Telegraph* and *Independent on Sunday* were credit crunched and the books pages of the national newspapers began to shrink.

While these traditional publicity outlets of printed reviews and essays are dwindling, there is a lively book community growing online that offers exciting opportunities for publishers to promote their books in a multitude of ways. The audience of online national book sections, such as the Guardian.co.uk and Telegraph Books Online, extends well beyond the circulation figures of their print companions. For Parthian's new crime novel set during the Naxalite uprisings in 1960s Calcutta, we placed a comment piece on the current Indian elections by author Glen Peters on the Guardian's Comment is Free website a month before publication. With a readership of 1.5 million unique users (more than four times the print edition) it was an early opportunity to engage with those interested in the subject matter and convey this interest to the booksellers.

There are also large numbers of influential book bloggers that champion

the social aspect of reading, such as Dove Grey Reader, who reviewed Honno's *Sweets from Morocco*. They link directly to online retailers such as The Book Depository, and often use Twitter accounts to point their 'followers' to new reviews and engage them in debate. Offering sample chapters, such as the Sci-Fi Now website running exclusive advance page spreads of Dalen's new graphic novel *Arthur: The Legend*, can excite early interest and build vital demand for a book before publication.

The internet is also becoming a valuable tool when dealing with the media itself. I was impressed with Graffeg's professional online review copy facility, as I could secure a journalist's interest immediately by getting them to browse through the book as they talked to me on the telephone.

With all these opportunities, online publicity is definitely no longer the poor relation of its print counterpart, and these innovative Welsh publishers are at the forefront of this digital future.

*Bethan Jones works for book publicists Macdougall Gabriel Associates.*

## Meeting Delyth Humphreys World Book Day Co-ordinator

I am always fascinated when I see something in its beginning. In nature there is nothing more thrilling than watching an egg hatch and seeing the chick for the very first time. When you call into Delyth Humphreys' office in Castell Brychan you can share in a similar experience, because this is where World Book Day in Wales is hatched annually.

Since 1999 Delyth Humphreys has been responsible for co-ordinating the annual celebrations of World Book Day in Wales. 'When I first started to work on promoting World Book Day in Wales at the end of the 1990s I was responsible for arranging events,' says Delyth. 'By now World Book Day has grown to the point that this is no longer necessary as bookshops, libraries, schools and a host of other partners organise their own events. My role now is to ensure that they have the resources that will enable them to celebrate the day in a variety of different ways.'

In addition to World Book Day Delyth co-ordinates a number of other programmes to promote books and reading. 'Last year was a very memorable one as I was seconded to co-ordinate the National Year of Reading in Wales. A number of exciting projects were organised, such as the reading clubs for children and young people, reading communities and the give a book campaign. Possibly one of the most interesting experiences was the opportunity to work with union learning representatives to promote reading in the work-place as part of a programme to develop basic skills.'

Quick Reads is another project that Delyth is



Delyth Humphreys

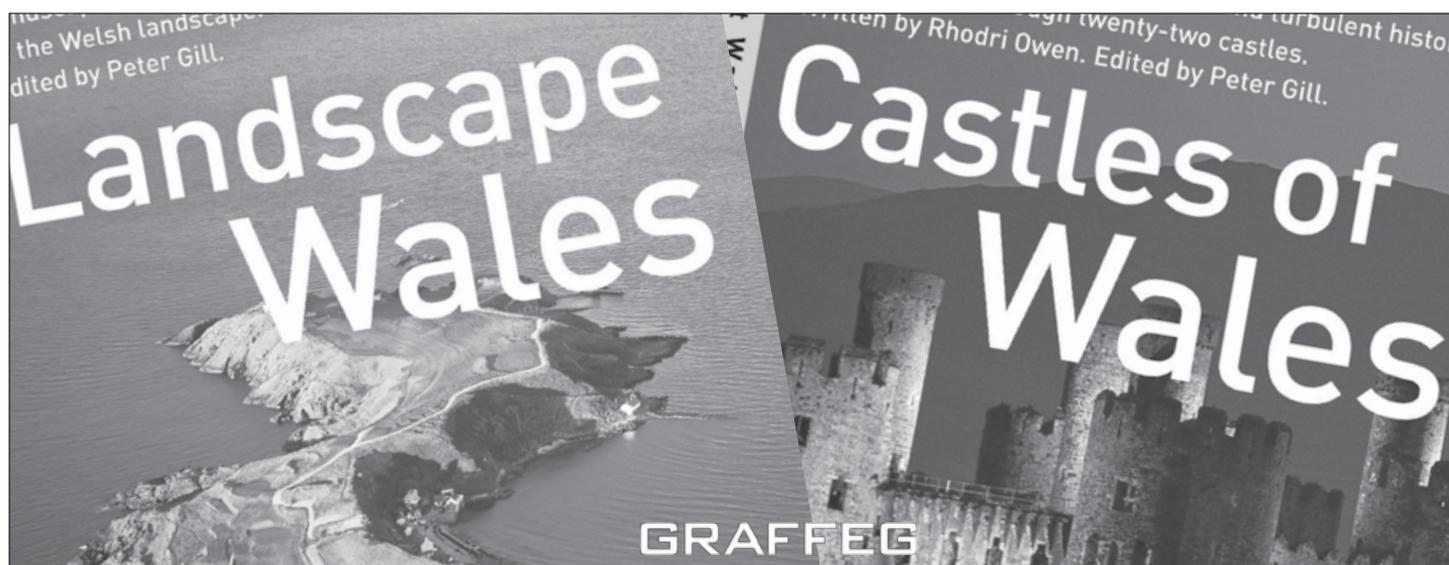
responsible for co-ordinating. This project provides books in both English and Welsh designed to encourage emergent adult readers to read more. There is growing evidence that Quick

Reads books can change lives and they are used widely to improve the life skills of very many people. 'The work done by the Shannon Trust in promoting reading among offenders in prison is especially inspiring,' says Delyth. 'It seems that as they become more confident readers, prisoners' attitudes change and they begin to realise that reading is a skill that can help them rebuild their lives.'

Delyth is a librarian by profession, having worked mainly in secondary schools. She was born in Glanamau, Carmarthenshire, raised in Ceredigion and has four grown-up children. As one would expect, books are very important to her, and there's nothing she likes better than to relax completely with a good book.

'Every librarian gets an enormous buzz when individuals and books are brought together because the possibilities are endless. The work which I do in co-ordinating the various programmes on behalf of the Books Council creates conditions and situations that make this possible. That is why hearing about the work done among trade unionists, prisoners and others, is such an inspiration and encouragement.'

# Graffeg: Publishing Wales in Pictures



Graffeg was created by Peter Gill, managing director of the successful graphic design agency Peter Gill & Associates, based in Cardiff. The new publishing arm of this long-established agency came from an idea of Peter's to introduce publishing into the design business. The name 'Graffeg' (Welsh for graphics) not only represents the beginnings of the publishing company but also the style of books published.

In Spring 2003 the first Graffeg book was published – *Cardiff Caerdydd*. This bilingual large format hardback is a photographic celebration of the Welsh capital. It was compiled in collaboration with Photolibary Wales and written by Graffeg's now long-standing author David Williams. The successful launch of this book was swiftly followed later

in the year by another hardback – *Landscape Wales Tirlun Cymru*. In 2004 Graffeg followed up on its success with two Landscape Wales paperbacks, one in the English language and the other in Welsh. Five years on, the Landscape Wales series of books remain highly popular with tourists and residents as its powerful images represent the best of the Welsh countryside and coast.

Over the years Graffeg's list of books and interest groups has increased to include *Food Wales*, the About Wales travel series, *Golf Wales*, *Skomer*, *Discovering Welsh Houses*, and more. However, Graffeg's aim to produce high-quality illustrated books about contemporary Welsh life remains consistent. Our most recent book, *Discovering Welsh Gardens*,

has enjoyed a very successful media campaign in Wales and throughout the UK. Stephen Lacey said in his double-page spread in *The Daily Telegraph*: 'a superb production with an opinionated and provocative text'.

Graffeg has built a reputation for the quality of its books and is gradually gaining awareness in England and Scotland as well as Wales with titles such as *Celtic Cuisine*. Graffeg is still a young company in the grand scheme of things but plans to widen the scope of its distribution within and beyond Wales with its new series of Pocket Wales books and the forthcoming black-and-white art photography book *Pembrokeshire* (David Wilson), a collection of mesmerising photographs. For more information, visit [www.graffeg.com](http://www.graffeg.com).

## Summer Reading Challenge

For the past decade, the children of Wales have been flocking to their local libraries every summer to take part in the national Summer Reading Challenge. They have been in a Reading Race, on a Reading Planet, in a Team Read and on a Reading Safari. This year they will be Questseekers, completing exciting reading tasks.

The aim of the challenge is to encourage children to visit the library during the summer period. By borrowing and reading six books they will complete the challenge and will be presented with a certificate and medal to recognise and celebrate their success. It gives children an opportunity to develop the habit of reading for pleasure – a habit which is crucial to educational achievement. Readers are welcome to choose any type of book, including audio books and large-print books, and the challenge is open to every child, whatever his or her ability – this is a personal challenge, not a competition.

The Challenge is co-ordinated by the Reading Agency and, in Wales, Welsh Assembly Government support is channelled through the Books Council as part of the Book Day funding, thus ensuring that the scheme is

available bilingually throughout Wales.

In Denbighshire, the number of children taking part in the Challenge has trebled, from 1100 in 1999 to 3373 in 2008 – the highest number in Wales. The Challenge was completed by 73% of those taking part – a figure which is within the top 20 throughout Britain. One reason for the success is the close partnership which exists between the Library Service, local schools and the council's literacy officers. Because of the themes selected, the Challenge appeals more or less equally to both boys and girls.

This is the most successful promotion activity that we invest in – and it brings thousands of children and their parents into our libraries during the summer. It creates a tremendous buzz of excitement and enthusiasm, and members of staff do their utmost to make the Challenge a memorable and valuable experience for

every child. The Reading Challenge is a key part of our reading development strategy to create a reading culture amongst the children of the county.

Bethan M. Hughes  
Manager of Reading Services,  
Denbighshire Library Service

