

THE FRIEND

Friends of the Welsh Books Council Newsletter



It was a great pleasure for me as Chair of the Friends of the Welsh Books Council to be able to wish Professor M. Wynn Thomas well in this year's annual meeting. As you will see in other reports in *The Friend* Wynn was celebrating his sixtieth birthday this year. He has been a great supporter of the work of the Books Council over the years and has also been a staunch supporter of the Friends; he is our current Vice-chair. I wish him all the best for the future.

As Chair I very much hope that you share my vision for the Friends as the body which is a voice for readers in Wales in its support for the work of the Books Council. I also hope that you share the vision in the planned project, discussed in a recent meeting of the steering committee, to establish some activity or prize to promote the book industry in Wales.

The work of the Books Council has shown that it cannot remain static. It must develop in parallel with the book industry, and always be prepared to meet new challenges. Likewise the Friends cannot remain static and we must take up the challenges of the changes seen in the Council and ensure that those changes are reflected and represented in our work as the voice of those who support the Council's work.

ALUN CREUNANT DAVIES
Chair, Friends of the Welsh
Books Council



Alun Creunant Davies (right) presenting a gift to Professor M Wynn Thomas

Honouring a Friend

For those who have attended previous meetings of the Friends, you will know that the programme usually entails Professor M. Wynn Thomas interviewing renowned authors about their life and work.

At this year's meeting held at Aberystwyth in October, we were able to direct the spotlight onto Wynn himself. Dr Tony Brown of the English Department, University of Wales Bangor, started the proceedings with an interview which highlighted Wynn's interest in the poetry of Walt Whitman and the writings of Morgan Llwyd. The

discussion then naturally moved on to Wynn's work in promoting Welsh writing in English.

We then had two personal tributes by authors Manon Rhys and Professor Hywel Teifi Edwards during which they spoke of their admiration of Wynn's tremendous work in promoting the literature of Wales in both languages.

The volume *Beyond the Difference* was published recently as an acknowledgement of Wynn's work and contains contributions by numerous acclaimed writers and poets.

STEERING COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the Steering Committee held on 2 October 2004 it was reported that the Friends had 413 members, a small decrease since September 2003 when there were 425 members. Although new members are joining the Friends on a regular basis the death of others accounts for this decrease in the total. It was noted that it was particularly difficult to attract younger people to join the Friends, even those who were active writers and literati, despite the fact that the annual subscription of £10 was a considerable bargain!

Although the financial position was reported to be satisfactory it was recommended that the annual subscription, which has remained the same since 1996, should be reviewed in 2005 in order to secure

more income for the Friends. That would allow the Friends to consider other means of sponsoring aspects of the book trade in Wales such as the creation of prizes or support for specific activities.

It was also reported that Friends of the Welsh Books Council, like other similar bodies, need to constantly increase their use of electronic communication media to publicise their activities. It would be of benefit to know, for example, how many of our members use electronic methods to communicate and access information. At the same time it was emphasised that those members who prefer not to adopt electronic media should not be denied more traditional information relating to the book trade in Wales.

My bookshelf – Karl Davies

Karl Davies, the Secretary of BBC Wales, shares his essential bookshelf of English-language books from Wales.

As I surveyed my shelves it became clear very quickly that the task of choosing my five essential English-language books from Wales would be much harder than I originally imagined. Does *The Welsh Academy English-Welsh Dictionary* count as an English-language book?



A question that could perhaps trigger hours and hours of debate over coffee amongst bibliophiles. I feel that I am on quite solid ground since the English title is prominent on the cover. But is a Welsh dictionary an English-language book? Another question which always comes to me as I turn to the dictionary is how did we cope before the 'Bruce' existed? It is essential without any doubt.

A Gazetteer of Welsh Place-names falls into the same category. An essential volume. It certainly proves wrong those who insist on two 'c' in the middle of Cricieth. I also often turn to it when I've got a few free minutes. The edition I have was published in 1967 and I wonder if it isn't time for it to be updated. It could be the work of one of our lesser-known quangos – the Consultative Committee on Place-names in Wales – before it is swallowed up in the bonfire of the quangos.

The Book of Common Prayer for use in the Church in Wales is a bilingual volume and so again I'm not on completely solid ground. But if I had to choose a book for a desert island and was only allowed an English-language volume then I would have to take out the Welsh pages in order to pass the test.

The Red Book: Eat Well in Wales by Gilli Davies is essential for travelling the length and breadth of Wales. Not so much because of the content on the pages of the volume itself but because of what has been stuffed between its pages since I bought it. Eating out in Wales has changed a lot since it was published in 1997. In the meantime I have filled it with newspaper cuttings and notes about places to eat suggested by friends and acquaintances. Perhaps I should publish my own Welsh Gastroaedia. Might a grant be available to enable me to eat for Wales for a year and publish the results!

I wouldn't choose to take *The Wales Yearbook* to a desert island. It's not leisure reading. Not even for someone with eccentric interests like me. But it is an invaluable source of information about contemporary Wales and has come to my rescue many times. I give my thanks for that.

Dafydd Charles Jones

Lyn Léwis Dafis has been in conversation with the manager of the Books Council's Distribution Centre

By now whenever one thinks of the Books Council one also thinks of its wonderful headquarters in Castell Brychan high on the hill overlooking Aberystwyth and Ceredigion Bay. But Castell Brychan is not the Council's only presence in the area. On the Glanyrafon Enterprise Park industrial estate you will find the Distribution Centre. It is not the easiest place to reach by public transport, so I decided to speak to the manager, Dafydd Charles Jones, by telephone. Dafydd is originally from Penuwch in Ceredigion and has been manager of the Centre since 1989.

Whenever I speak to members of the Welsh Books Council staff about their work I am always struck by their enthusiasm; Dafydd is no different. The more he spoke about his work and what the Centre was trying to achieve the guiltier I felt about my lazy use of the telephone rather than having walked all the way to Llanbadarn to see with my own eyes what their work entailed.

"I feel that we are here to help the book industry in Wales and beyond," says Dafydd. "The Centre is there to help publishers, booksellers and individual customers. We help the publishers by enabling them to distribute their products to over 800 outlets in Wales and on the borders. At any time there will be over 12,000 different titles in stock. This also helps the bookshops – here they have one point of contact for all their needs rather than having to deal with dozens of different publishers. So the work of ensuring that they have the latest titles on their shelves is so much easier."

Dafydd is proud that the Centre offers the best possible service to its customers. Since 1997 that work has been made easier with the implementation of the comprehensive Vista stock-control system which enables booksellers individuals to order books electronically from the Centre. "I expect that the majority of Friends will be acquainted with *gwales.com* as a means for individuals to order books, but the same system is used by booksellers to order

from the Centre. We now guarantee bookshops that any order received in the morning will be delivered by lunchtime on the following day. And, of course, it's the information that we input into the system that allows anyone using the *gwales.com* website to know what is in print and available from the Centre.

"*Gwales.com* orders are also sent from the Centre to individuals throughout the world. It's surprising how many orders come from abroad for Welsh-language and English-language books from Wales."



Dafydd and his 14 staff have seen great changes in the book industry and the changes just keep on coming. So in order to ensure that books from Wales compete in such a changing market they have to be at the forefront of change. "As you know, I'm sure, the way books are sold changes all the time. Setting-up *gwales.com* was a great step forward and will guarantee a bright future for us. But at the same time people are also buying more and more books from book chains and supermarkets and so we must build up a relationship with these large chains in order to ensure that books from Wales are also seen on those shelves."

With a turnover of more than £4 million annually the Distribution Centre is a large business which stands on its own two feet but is an aspect of the Books Council's work which does not receive much public attention. But as Dafydd himself says, "The Centre is an intrinsic part of the Council's work as it ensures that all the hard work done behind the scenes comes to its successful conclusion as the books reach the readers and buyers in the end."

Latest news on *gwales.com*

When did you last surf the Books Council's *gwales.com* website? If it was some time ago it is worth another visit now after recent major changes were put in place. Following on from comments and suggestions by users the website has undergone a major redesign making it much easier to search and use.

The biggest changes have been to the website's homepage. In addition to making it easier to search it also offers links to lists of books according to subject, information about the Welsh-language Novel of the Month and the Book of the Month schemes. It also offers users a selection of newly published books to browse. The homepage also gives access to the latest reviews to have appeared on *gwales*, bestseller lists and details about special offers. The information is updated daily with new lists appearing regularly, and as a result many people are becoming very regular users of the website.

In another development users have the opportunity to register in order to set-up their preferences as to language and categories of books that are of interest to them. As before, books can be ordered instantly through the *gwales.com* website or through a local bookshop.

The new website was developed by a local company Ateb Ltd. with the support of the Welsh Assembly Government.



Christmas Titles

The Christmas period is one of the busiest and most important for the book trade and the Books Council is again producing two supplements, which are an excellent introduction to the titles published this year.

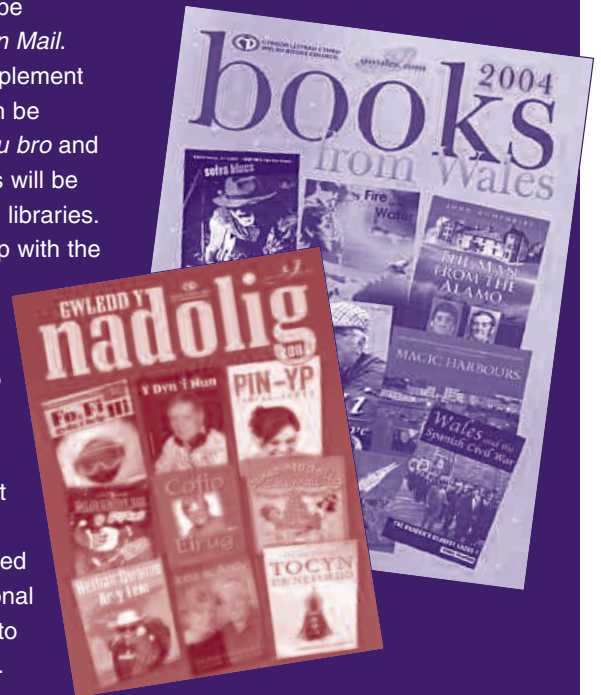
The selection of English-language titles can be seen in the *Books from Wales* supplement of which 50,000 copies will be produced to be distributed with the *Western Mail*.

The Welsh-language supplement *Gwledd y Nadolig* will again be distributed with the *papurau bro* and copies of both supplements will be available in bookshops and libraries.

'By working in partnership with the publishers and booksellers, the Books Council is able to produce two colourful supplements,' said Phil Davies, Head of Marketing at the Books Council. 'We are aware that the public appreciate these supplements and are pleased to be able to enclose personal copies of the supplements to all members of the Friends.'

Once you've seen the excellent selection of books on sale this year we are sure that you'll also enjoy reading them.'

Further information regarding the titles featured in both supplements can be seen on www.gwales.com as well as an opportunity to order them through the website.



In Honour of Islwyn

In the last issue of *The Friend*, our chair Alun Creunant Davies gave a tribute to the late Islwyn Ffowc Elis and reflected on Islwyn's close association with the Books Council. In this issue we can report that Eirlys Ffowc Elis and family have presented the Council with a chair to note his contribution to Welsh literature.

Islwyn won the chair at the Lewis's Eisteddfod in Liverpool in 1947 and it was in this chair that he sat to write his early novels, including *Cysgod y Cryman*. The novel was first published in 1953 and is still popular today and has been translated as *Shadow of the Sickie* by Meic Stephens. As part of the World Book Day celebrations in 2000 *Cysgod y Cryman* was nominated by the public as the Welsh-language Book of the Century.

'It is a great privilege for us to receive this chair in honour of someone who has contributed so much to Welsh literature,' said

Gwerfyl Pierce Jones, Director of the Books Council. 'Islwyn was a great friend of the Books Council since the early days. He had been a member of staff, editor of the *Llais Lyfrau/Books from Wales* magazine and also an Honorary President of the Friends of the Books Council.'

The chair can be seen in the reception area at the Books Council's head office in Aberystwyth.



Welsh Writing in English

English-language publishing and books from Wales have been in the spotlight over the last year – an exciting period which has seen the launch of an historic Assembly report into Welsh writing in English and the announcement of additional funding for this neglected literature.

In August last year, the Culture Committee began its policy review into English-medium writing in Wales and on 31 March of this year launched a report which outlined a series of far-reaching recommendations, addressing issues such as weaknesses in publishers' infrastructure and reaching wider audiences through libraries, bookshops and the media. In what was welcomed as a vote of confidence for Welsh writing in English, WH Smith appeared at this launch to announce their own 'Books from Wales' promotion and 'WH Smith Book of the Month'.

Just five weeks later, Alun Pugh, Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport announced a 'downpayment' of £250,000 (to be spent in this financial year) to enable immediate progress on implementing some of the recommendations made by the Committee. The breathtaking speed with which the Assembly has responded to the challenges of helping to develop the English-language publishing industry in Wales has meant that publishers are already receiving the first grants allocated under the new schemes set up (also with breathtaking speed!) by the Welsh Books Council over the summer.

The new schemes will allow publishers to offer more competitive advances to authors to secure books of popular appeal and to invest more in marketing and promotion of a wider range of books. Increased sales of a more diverse list of titles will be of vital importance in helping publishers to create stability in the longer term, while allowing sufficient margins for new ventures. A small fund has also been created to help support editorial and marketing posts in Wales. Part of the £250,000 announced by the Minister for Culture will be spent on establishing a series of classic texts (called the 'Library of Wales') with a small amount being set aside to create a series of trade awards to encourage excellence in the industry.

It will, of course, take time and sustained and significant investment to bring about the changes envisaged in the Culture Committee's report. Great expectations have been raised by the Minister and the report of the Culture Committee. The initial response of the publishing industry has demonstrated that, as expected, the energy and enthusiasm exists to make the most of these new opportunities. The next step is to ensure that sufficient resources are available over the coming years to really make a difference.

The University of Wales Press – Ashley Drake

The Director of the press looks at what the future holds for UWP.

The University of Wales Press has a long, illustrious and fascinating history. The past twelve months have done nothing to diminish this although for all of those aware of recent events at the Press, 2003/04 will certainly be remembered as a period of major change. Along with the industrious Director Susan Jenkins, seven other members of staff (over 50% of the staff complement) decided, for varying reasons, it was time to move on, leaving the remaining staff, as well as senior officers of the University and the Press's Management Board, to ensure a smooth transition to a new regime. It speaks volumes for the professionalism of the remaining staff at UWP that the publication schedule was maintained with only the occasional and fully understandable 'blip'.

With the events of the past couple of years behind us UWP is now looking forward to new and exciting times. We have returned to our full complement of staff and have been very fortunate to have attracted such high calibre individuals to the Press. The new faces have injected enthusiasm and dynamism into UWP, which complements wonderfully the experience and knowledge of the existing staff. This will serve us well over the coming years.

So what does the future hold for UWP? Can the Press look confidently ahead to the next ten years and to its centenary in 2022? In my view the answer is quite clearly yes, although UWP will have to make fundamental changes if it is to secure this bright future. The Press needs to become more financially self-reliant and not so dependent upon the goodwill and funding of other organisations as it currently is. Whilst the goodwill should remain, the funding may not and in these ever changing times it is unwise, as well

as bad business practice, to be too heavily dependent upon others.

New technology offers new solutions to old problems and I wish to see UWP embrace the opportunities presented by electronic and digital publishing as well as Print on Demand (PoD). This new technology is ideally suited to academic publishing and to the needs of the Welsh language. A renaissance in high level Welsh-language publishing is possible by using new technology and I believe that UWP should be at the forefront of that 'adfywiad'.

I also wish to see UWP playing a bigger role internationally by broadening its subject base and working with the very many talented academics within the University of Wales who are world-renowned experts in subjects not previously published by the Press. By specialising in niche areas of mainstream and global academia UWP can promote the excellence of the University, further enhance its reputation and, very importantly, generate income.

UWP has achieved an enviable reputation for quality publishing over a period of 80 years and has a special place in the hearts of the Welsh people. It is truly an honour to be in the position of leading the Press at this exciting time and I am certainly looking forward to the challenge.

