

## The Annual Meeting



The Chair of the Friends, Tegwyn Jones, presenting a poem by Gwyn Thomas to Gwerfyl Pierce Jones

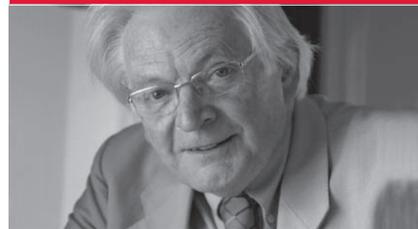
The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Welsh Books Council has become a red-letter day in the calendar of those who interest themselves in the sphere of books and their authors. It is a homely, informal meeting, which is also instructive, where the Chairman of the Books Council, Professor M. Wynn Thomas, in his astute but kindly manner, interviews prominent contemporary authors about their lives and works. At our last meeting, in October 2009, after the Chairman's brief report, and an important announcement by the Treasurer, Mr Richard Morgan (see the 'From the Chair' column), we diverged a little from introducing our usual kind of guest. In April 2009, the Director of the Welsh Books Council, Gwerfyl Pierce

Jones, had notified the Council of her intention to retire in the autumn, and suddenly the 'star' slot of the Annual Meeting had been decided for us. It was good to welcome her and to learn, from her responses to Wynn's questions, of her Caergybi (Holyhead) days, of her career before joining the Books Council, and of her leadership of the Council for almost a quarter of a century. With an anecdote here, a revelation there, and with many a penetrating observation regarding the world of publishing in Wales, she succeeded in entertaining a large audience for the best part of an hour. Being aware of her admiration of the poetry of the former National Poet, Gwyn Thomas, her colleagues commissioned him to write a poem on the occasion of her retirement. He responded with a brilliant poem, rich in its images, in which he speaks of St Cybi with his 'caer' (fort) above the sea in Caergybi (Holyhead), and how a native of that place found herself in another 'caer' above the sea in Ceredigion, where she – like the saint of old – also performed miracles. When one considers the healthy and robust state of the publishing trade in Wales at present – thanks mainly to Gwerfyl – that is no hyperbole. The poem was lettered and framed and presented to Gwerfyl together with the best wishes of all present, and of her friends and acquaintances throughout Wales.

At the same meeting it was a pleasure to congratulate and welcome the new Director, Elwyn Jones, and to wish him every success.

## From the Chair

Tegwyn Jones



The function of the 'Friends' of any institution is to promote and support the work of that institution in practical ways. In his report to our General Meeting in October 2009, our Treasurer outlined our intentions to contribute £1,500 this year towards purchasing books for the 08 Reading Clubs, which seeks to promote the reading of books by teenagers, and to contribute a similar sum towards the Mary Vaughan Jones Award which was presented in March this year to Angharad Tomos. This is an Award (or Trophy) awarded triennially to mark a significant contribution to children's literature and, as well as supporting this year's Award, it was decided that we shall set aside an annual sum which will mean that in future, providing for this important Award will be the responsibility of the Friends.

At the same meeting in October, our Treasurer, Mr Richard Morgan, asked to be relieved of his post which he has held since the early days of the Friends. It is a privilege to thank him warmly for his sterling work over the years, for being a safe pair of hands at all times, and to assure him of our very best wishes as he leaves.



Hywel Teifi

With the death of Hywel Teifi, we have lost an historian and a man of letters, someone who was a natural leader, both in his local community and nationally. He was a unique communicator and public lecturer, the likes of whom has not been seen since those colourful and brilliant days that characterised the Victorian era, a period on which he was such an authority. Indeed, we have lost someone who grew to be a legend and an icon in his own lifetime.

## Hywel Teifi

He was one of the first members of the Friends of the Welsh Books Council and attended the Annual Meeting regularly. In October 2008 he was our special guest and, in the company of M. Wynn Thomas, we heard tales of his upbringing and youth in Aber-arth and of early influences in those formative years. What a memorable afternoon. We hold rich memories of this great person to whom we owe so much thanks for all he did for Wales and the Welsh language.

# My Favourite Books

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



Sandra Anstey

I am writing this surrounded by traditional Christmas images, including a snow-covered view from my window. I am sure that R. S. Thomas would have smiled at the news that Rage Against the Machine has reached the Christmas No. 1 spot in the UK pop charts this year! His *Collected Poems* featured in a short piece that I wrote for the Welsh Books Council Newsletter in 2002, and

those same poems are still firmly on my list of favourite books for 2010.

But for other 2010 choices I move to more recent publications.

I start in reflective mood with Diana Athill's *Somewhere Towards the End*, a remarkable piece of writing about the pleasure and pain of old age. She presents a lively narrative in a style as lucid as one would expect from an editor at Andre Deutsch. This book, winner of the Costa Biography Award 2008, provides a female voice to complement Julian Barnes' *Nothing to be Frightened of*: both are meditations on mortality that are upbeat and unsentimental, and have been a joy to reread this Christmas when remembering family and friends who are no longer with us.

*John Piper, Myfanwy Piper: Lives in Art*, the recent double biography by Frances Spalding, appeared in my Christmas stocking. It is an impressive, well-researched book which explores the work of two artists who were involved in so many diverse projects – writing, editing, painting, illustrating, working on operas with Britten and Hodginott, designing

stained glass windows and wallpaper, etc. – and kept close links with Wales through having a base here for more than fifty years. Another biography that I've just finished is *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale* in which Dai Smith brings together his richly detailed research, drawing on many unpublished papers (including Williams' father's diaries). This book has given me a glimpse of Raymond Williams' world – his childhood in Pandy, his studies in Cambridge, the army and Adult Education. And it has also sent me back to his *Border Country*, Raymond Williams' moving portrayal of a relationship between father and son, which is now thankfully available via the Library of Wales series.

My final choice is the superb catalogue *Anish Kapoor* that accompanied the artist's exhibition at the Royal Academy during the closing months of 2009. The lavish publication recreates through image and text the visual impact of a stunning exhibition of stainless steel, huge blocks of red wax and strong colour. It's a bold, vibrant statement with which to welcome the new year.

## Joint Celebrations Provide New Opportunities



Rhodri and Lucy Owen, the faces of Give a Book Week 2010

Give a Book Week provided a new burst of energy for World Book Day this year! On the recommendation of the National Year of Reading evaluation reports, the Week's celebrations have now been amalgamated with those of Book Day. As a result, both schemes have reaped the benefits. World Book Day – which, by now, is a regular date on the calendars of schools and early years groups, libraries and colleges, publishers and booksellers, the voluntary sector and trade unions, the press and media – enjoyed a new dimension to its activities. Similarly, linking Give a Book Week to a well-established event will

help the Week to become an integral part of the annual pattern of events to promote books and reading in Wales.

Give a Book Week was launched at the Senedd, Cardiff Bay, on Wednesday, 24 February, in the company of Leighton Andrews, the Education Minister, and Lucy Owen, the BBC presenter and face of the Give a Book Week campaign for 2010. All who were present at the launch received a book as a gift to note the occasion and to reinforce the main message of the Week, namely to encourage people in Wales to give a book as a gift to a friend, a colleague or a member of the family during the period 27 February to 6 March.

With the support of the publishers and co-operation of the booksellers, a special campaign was arranged to offer Welsh-language books at reduced prices, and a number of familiar faces in Wales joined in the Week's celebrations by giving books to each other. Amongst the celebrities were Tim Rhys-Evans, musical director of *Only Men Aloud*, and Ludovic Dieumegard, the chef who reached the semi-final stage of BBC's *Masterchef* competition.

As a part of the World Book Day events (4 March), the annual lecture was held on 2 March at the Millennium Centre with Professor Sir Deian Hopkin as guest speaker. In co-operation with the Welsh Video Network, videoconferencing sessions were held for secondary schools and colleges by Mererid Hopwood and Gillian Clarke. Competitions were arranged for reading clubs, with the winners enjoying visits by the authors Catrin Dafydd and Fflur Dafydd. Packs of bilingual resources were sent to libraries, booksellers and schools, and Book Day and Give a Book Week were given newly-designed web pages on the Books Council's website – another development that was warmly welcomed.

## Annual Book Sale

Once again, the Welsh Books Council is holding a book sale and we're delighted to enclose a copy of this year's catalogue which includes books at half-price or less.

The catalogue includes an excellent selection of books for children and adults, in both English and Welsh, and we'd like to thank the publishers for producing such an interesting list of titles.

'This year, we've produced a colourful catalogue of sale books,' said Emma Evans, Marketing Officer at the Welsh Books Council, 'and we hope that the catalogue will give the sale titles a boost.'

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. In case of difficulty, you're welcome to contact the Sales and Marketing Department (01970 624455).

The annual sale is held during March and April – therefore don't miss out on that all-important bargain!

## The Mary Vaughan Jones Award 2009



Mr David Barker (Chair of the Children's Books Panel), Mrs Anne Lloyd-Jones (Chair of Gwynedd Council), Angharad Tomos and Lyn Léwis Dafis

The Mary Vaughan Jones Award 2009 has been won by Angharad Tomos from Pen-y-groes, Gwynedd. She is one of our most prolific authors and is best known as the author of the *Cyfes Rwdlan* series of books for young children. This series has been the inspiration for television programmes, CD-ROMs and a series of new reading books for primary schools, *Cyfes Darllen Mewn Dim*.

Angharad has won the Literary Medal at the Urdd National Eisteddfod twice, and also the Prose Medal, at the National Eisteddfod twice – in Mold (1991) for her novel *Si Hei Lwli* and in Bala (1997) for *Wle'n Gwawrio*. She has also won the Tir na-Og award twice – in 1986 for *Y Llipryn Llwyd* (Cyfes Rwdlan) and in 1994 for *Sothach a Sglyfath* (Cyfes Cled).

The award was established to commemorate Mary Vaughan Jones, one of the main benefactors of children's literature in Wales and it is awarded every three years to recognise contributions in this field. Amongst past winners are Ifor Owen, Emily Huws and T. Llew Jones.

Members of the Friends of the Welsh Books Council will be particularly interested in the award this time as the Friends have sponsored it as part of their support for the work of the Books Council. It takes the form of a silver trophy depicting characters from Mary Vaughan Jones's books made by Canolfan Aur Cymru, Tregaron.

The award was presented to Angharad Tomos in a special ceremony at Ysgol Bro Lleu, Pen-y-groes, in March 2010.

## Awards for Welsh Publishers



The awards dinner at the MedRus Mawr restaurant

The names of the winners of the Publishing Trade Awards were announced at a special ceremony held in Aberystwyth in the presence of the Minister for Heritage.

Alun Ffred Jones said, 'It was a great pleasure to be present at the ceremony to honour the work of the publishers;

the nature and high standard of the output is reflected in the sales of books from Wales, in both languages.

'We all take pride in our fine literary tradition and the Welsh Assembly Government is pleased to support our culture through the provision of a wide range of books for readers of all ages.'

### English-language Winners

**FICTION BESTSELLER**  
Accent  
*Bring It Back Home*, Niall Griffiths

**NON-FICTION BESTSELLER**  
Accent  
*The Hardest Test*, Scott Quinnell

**POETRY BESTSELLER**  
Seren  
*Sunday at the Skin Launderette*,  
Kathryn Simmonds

**CHILDREN'S BESTSELLER**  
Pont  
*A Nod From Nelson*, Simon Weston

**MOST BORROWED LIBRARY BOOK**  
Seren  
*Blue Sky July*, Nia Wyn

**DESIGN AND PRODUCTION**  
Gomer  
*Random Deaths and Custard*, Catrin Dafydd

**DESIGN AND PRODUCTION (CHILDREN)**  
Pont  
*Merlin's Magical Creatures*, Graham Howells

**PHOTOGRAPHIC / ART BOOK**  
Gomer  
*From Africa to Iceland*, John Rogers

### Welsh-language Winners

**FICTION BESTSELLER**  
Gomer  
*O Ran*, Mererid Hopwood

**NON-FICTION BESTSELLER**  
Y Lolfa  
*Cofio Grav*, Keith Davies

**POETRY BESTSELLER**  
Gomer  
*Dauwynebog*, Ceri Wyn Jones

**CHILDREN'S BESTSELLER**  
Gomer  
*Chwarae gyda Cymro*, Caroline Jayne Church

**MOST BORROWED LIBRARY BOOK**  
Gomer  
*Mae Mali Eisiau Mwy*, Joseph Theobald

**DESIGN AND PRODUCTION**  
Y Lolfa  
*Plu*, Caryl Lewis

**DESIGN AND PRODUCTION (CHILDREN)**  
Atebol  
*Mathiadur (Geiriadur Mathemateg Cyntaf)*  
Robin Bateman

**PHOTOGRAPHIC / ART BOOK**  
Gomer  
*Rhyw Deid yn Dod Miwn*, Iwan Llwyd

# Meeting Helena O'Sullivan

## Sales and Marketing Manager



Helena O'Sullivan

Meeting different members of the Welsh Books Council staff always gives me the opportunity to stick my head round doors which are not usually open to the public. Not that the Books Council has anything to hide, it's just not practical to give everyone access to everywhere.

I had a wonderful opportunity the day I met up with Helena Ní Shúilleabháin, the Sales and Marketing manager, at the Distribution Centre on the Glanrafon

Business Park in Llanbadarn Fawr. As I walked into the warehouse, which also houses Helena's office, I was struck by the scale of the publishing industry in Wales. According to Helena, the centre stocks around 10,000 different titles and it is her job to make sure as many as possible of them are sold.

From day to day, Helena is responsible for managing a team of four representatives. These representatives work across Wales, going from shop to shop, from one place to another, promoting books from Wales and receiving orders.

'Basically, our main work as a Sales and Marketing team is to ensure that we sell more books. I know that sounds simple, but it means a lot of work and taking a creative and imaginative approach to that work,' she says.

'We work mainly with independent bookshops and chain stores, but we also supply all sorts of other shops and outlets, such as tourist information centres, tourist attractions and various supermarkets and we must take a different approach to each, and every one requires different support from the team.'

Helena began working at the Books Council as a sales representative and then, after a period as the shop manager at the National Library, she returned to the Books Council to take up her present post.

'One of the great challenges for me and my team is to find new outlets for books

and to increase the sales in those outlets. You have to look for opportunities and take advantage of them when they arise. Recently we had the opportunity to supply the Welsh Rugby Union shop near the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff with books. It took a little bit of persuasion to get books into the shop, but I'm glad to say that it looks as if our efforts have been awarded and things are going well. In the same way, getting Welsh-language books and books from Wales into Early Learning Centre shops has been a good way not only of finding a new market but also of ensuring that we are nurturing readers from an early stage.'

Helena herself was raised in the Corca Dhuibhne area of Ireland. After studying at Maynooth University, and a period at Roskilde University in Denmark, she worked at the Celtica centre in Machynlleth. It was at that time that she became aware of the Welsh language for the first time and started to learn Welsh. Since then she has married a Welshman and is raising her two children to speak Welsh.

'I was raised to speak Irish at home. I also inherited a love of books from my parents and reading was a very important pastime for us. That's why I still enjoy reading so much and derive great pleasure from reading with my children, especially with my son Oisín. He's just started school and is very patient with his mother – he is willing to correct her whenever she makes a mistake with her Welsh!'

## Cinnamon Press



Cinnamon Press is a family-run small press in Blaenau Ffestiniog. We began with a poetry magazine, but soon decided to experiment with a literary competition to find our first novel and poetry collections. We selected Francesca McMahon's excellent first

novel, *How to Marry the Dead*, and four poetry collections, including Bill Greenwell's debut, *Impossible Objects*, short-listed for the Forward Prize for best first collection. Our competitions now include novellas and short stories and we publish anthologies of the best poems and stories submitted, though books that come via the competitions are now only a small part of our list, the majority coming from open submissions.

We will soon have 100 titles in print in under five years: a mixture of poetry, fiction, some non-fiction (especially creative and mixed genre) and, this year, our first collection of poetry and images, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*, by Philip Gross and Simon Denison. Several books have been short-listed for prizes, including winning the Scottish Arts Best First Book (*Morocco Rococo* by Jane McKie) and the Reader's Award in Wales

Book of the Year (*TAG* by Stephen May).

We aim to make a significant contribution to Welsh writing in English whilst bringing great writing into Wales. In addition to talented Welsh authors, Cinnamon writers come from the UK, USA, China, Africa and Europe... We're beginning work on an exciting poetry anthology from minority language poets in Sardinia. We publish books that we love and aim to develop good relationships with authors and maintain high production values. We receive a lot of positive feedback on our distinctive covers and put a great deal of thought into each book, from editing to launch. Our motto is 'independent, innovative and international' and those elements remain key ingredients as we move into the next five years of publishing.