

THE WELSH SOCIETY OF VANCOUVER

Cymdeithas Gymraeg Vancouver

Cambrian News

Rhagfyr
2013

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Society Newsletter - Cylchgrawn y Gymdeithas



**Anniversary Dinner Honorees: Gaynor, Pat,
John Morris photo, Lynn and Gillian**

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The Cambrian News

From The Editor:

This newsletter was not meant to contain events information since these were sent out separately. However I should remind you of the AGM on Monday December 8th. The two 'A Child's Christmas in Wales' performances on the 12th and 13th are both already sold out!

Look forward to St. Dwynwen's Day on the 25th of January and mark it on your 2014 Calendar!

So this issue reports on past events and also contains an obituary for our long time member **Theophilus Jones**. I am grateful to Eifion Williams for his article on the founders of the Hall and one on Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd; also to Ieuan Lampshire Jones for a copy of the October 1980 newsletter. The front page photo at the Anniversary Dinner was taken by Kathy Thomas. Pat Morris' letter of thanks is below.

David Llewelyn Williams

*Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn
Newydd DDa i chwi oll!*

On behalf of our family, I should like to thank the Vancouver Welsh Society very much for honouring John's memory at the Anniversary Dinner, with the beautiful photograph and the wonderful tributes for his service to the Society in recent years. He was happy to be a part of such a special group of friends and compatriots. I am so grateful for all the help and support I have received this year.

Sincerely, Pat Morris

Anniversary Dinner Celebrates Cambrian Hall History

The annual Anniversary Dinner was held on Saturday, October 19th to celebrate the 84th Anniversary of the building of the Cambrian Hall. The building was erected in 1929, although Welsh immigrants had been arriving on the west coast of Canada for at least 100 years before then, long before Vancouver's incorporation as a city in 1886.

A year after the city's incorporation, the first transcontinental train arrived in Vancouver. A band had gathered and played 'Hail the Conquering Hero Comes' to celebrate the train's arrival. The first person to step off the train was a 22-year old Welshman, who could be forgiven for thinking the ceremony and the music was all on his behalf.

That young man was Jonathan Rogers, who was born in Plas-Onn in the Ceiriog Valley in North Wales. He grew up speaking only Welsh and at 16 moved to Liverpool to find work and to learn to speak English. Inheriting a small legacy, he sailed for Canada, arriving in Montreal and taking the first trans-continental train to the west coast.

Soon after he arrived, armed with what remained of his legacy, Rogers bought four CPR lots at an auction of CPR lands. Those lots would now be in downtown Vancouver. He started work as a painter and eventually became a construction contractor in the booming city.

Rogers became a very wealthy man, a developer and a philanthropist, and a prominent Vancouver civic leader. He never lost his love for Wales and his name is now commemorated on the

cornerstone of the Cambrian Hall as one of its wealthy donors.

Twenty-five years before Jonathan Rogers stepped off the train, a young man named David Spencer arrived in Victoria from St. Athan, Vale of Glamorgan, hoping to profit from the Cariboo gold rush. He opened a dry goods store in Victoria, which expanded into a department store, with branches later established in Nanaimo, Chilliwack and New Westminster.

When a Spencer's Department store opened in Vancouver, David's eldest son Chris became its President and eventually a very wealthy man. The store, David Spencer Ltd., was later sold to Eaton's. The list of Chris Spencer's community service is impressive. Among other achievements he was President of the Board of Trade and a founding member of the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Vancouver Symphony. A major beneficiary of UBC, he established a Foundation to enable worthy students to attend UBC. He was also a major supporter of the Welsh community and his name is also enshrined on the cornerstone as a major donor to the building of the Hall.

Another Welshman, a miner's son from Llanelli, arrived in Vancouver in 1889. Trained as a carpenter and joiner, Thomas Edwards became a pioneer builder and prominent businessman in Vancouver and later a highly respected funeral director. He was also a generous philanthropist. Thomas Edwards was one of the first to make a donation to cover the cost of a fully equipped field ambulance for service at the front in the Second World War. He was also in 1948 the first Leader of the Overseas Welsh at

the National Eisteddfod of Wales. His name is on the cornerstone as a major contributor, especially of materials for the building's construction.

Another name on the cornerstone is that of Joseph Jones, who owned a dairy farm between Glen Drive and what is now Kingsway. Joseph had arrived in 1883 from Prestatyn, North Wales. An old newspaper account of the Jones Dairy in 1896 reported that the Jones farm had 58 cows, which produced an average of 110 gallons of milk per day. Joseph Jones donated the land on which the Hall is built for a nominal \$1 sum.

The Cambrian Hall exists as a symbol of the generosity of the men mentioned above, as well as the six others whose names are also on the cornerstone. These men valued their Welsh heritage while at the same time making huge contributions to the prosperity and growth of the city.

The actual building of the Hall was done largely by voluntary labour. When the Hall was officially opened in September 1929, it committed future members of the Cambrian Society, which became the Welsh Society, to a sacred charge – the preservation of a unique asset for the future benefit of the Welsh in Vancouver, the only facility of its kind in North America. As well as the debt the Welsh of Vancouver owe to wealthy donors, it is important to remember those who were involved in the building of the Hall and those who have helped preserve the building over the past 84 years through their voluntary efforts.

In recent years the Hall has continued to be plagued by structural problems that have been a financial drain on the Society. Last year, the floor of the Red

Dragon was found to have severe structural problems requiring immediate attention. Fortunately for the Society, a volunteer work crew dedicated many hours to replacing sections of the floor and foundations of the building.

At the Anniversary Dinner special recognition was given to the late John Morris for his prodigious efforts in leading the floor work crew and for his contributions to the Society in general, including a term as President. A framed portrait of John will hang permanently in a place of honour in the Hall. Also honoured for their contributions to the Hall and to the Welsh Society in general were Lynne Owens-Whalen, Chair of the Building Committee, Pat Morris, Gaynor Evans and Gillian Rogers (see photo).

The guest soloist at the Dinner was Lois Carter, who won First Prize at the 2003 Festival of Wales in Richmond and went on to compete in the National Eisteddfod of Wales. Lois pleased the audience with musical selections on the theme of anniversaries and memories, ending with a rousing Welsh version of the Drinking Song from La Traviata.

Eifion Williams

Vancouver celebrates Wales

On Saturday, November 2nd and Sunday, November 3rd, the Society celebrated Wales through a Noson Lawen on Saturday evening; a church service on Sunday morning and a Gymanfa on Sunday afternoon. Unfortunately the weather did not conspire to favour us on Saturday so the turnout was low. This was really unfortunate for those who didn't hear Antoine Minard's illustrated talk on "A Hobgoblin on Every Stile - Halloween Night in Wales". Most informative and

fascinating. Antone is an unique resource that other societies would prize. Even the rain should not keep you away!

After a break for some food, the evening continued with two quizzes formulated by Eifion Williams and both won by the same (expert!) table. David Llewelyn Williams showed three short videos by Ron Davies; Cariadon about St. Dwynwen, The Exiled Mind which affected most of us and Nant Gwytheyrn about its history from a stone quarry for English cities to a Welsh Language residential school. We were also entertained by Rhuanedd Meilen on the piano.

Sunday morning dawned bright and beautiful, but the attendance still left much to be desired. Jane Byrne, our President, presided and the Welsh readings were given by her visiting sisters, Hetty Martin and Dr. Mair Williams. Corresponding readings in English were given by Kathy Thomas and Dr. Mary Lewis. Nerys Haqq once again gave the solo with accompanist Ray Batten and David Llewelyn Williams gave the Sgwrs. Especially since it recognized R.S. Thomas' centenary, I have included the Sgwrs for the information of those unable to attend.

Sunday afternoon, the Gymanfa Ganu conducted by Jonathan Quick assembled in the Upper Hall and resounded resonantly. The hundredth Psalm was read by Mareth Hunter in Welsh and by Pat Morris in English. The quality of the singing was indeed exceptional – maybe because others like me were in a minority. In the intervals, we were privileged to hear Natasha Neufeld perform; sometimes in duets with husband, Jonathan

Quick. I am not qualified to make musical judgments, but, for me, these were some of the most beautiful songs I have experienced. Together with Jonathan's conducting and his good humour and Barry Yamanouchi's accompaniment, this was a Gymanfa to remember.

We all moved to the Lower Hall in an inspired spirit to socialize and enjoy the generous te bach provided by the Social Committee.

RS Thomas (Sgwrs by D. Ll. W. Sunday November 3, Vancouver)

Today, I'd like to say a few words about RS Thomas, the Welsh poet nominated for a Nobel Prize, whose centenary is being celebrated throughout Wales this year. His literary executor, Professor M. Wynn Thomas, of Swansea University, initiated the first event on April 11 at Bangor University, followed by an exhibition of materials from the RS Thomas Centre's archive there and the launch of a new book RS Thomas' Uncollected Poems. The series will continue and conclude next March.

Menna Elfyn gave an address on RS at the Hay Festival this summer – her daughter Fflur Dafydd, lecturer in English at Swansea, wrote her Ph.D. thesis on RS at Bangor under the direction of Jason Walford Davies, who wrote a significant ground breaking study: *Goreuau'r Iaith: RS Thomas a'r Traddodiad Llenyddol Cymraeg*. (2003). Last Friday at the Taliesin Arts Centre at Swansea University under the title 'Laboratories of the Spirit', Dr. Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales and Dr. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, discussed the religious poetry of RS.

Alcwyn's cousin, Byron Rogers, wrote a biography of RS entitled *The Man who went into the West*, for which he won the James Tait Black Prize for Biography for 2007. The cover photograph on Byron's book shows RS as a country priest on a bicycle. Professor Wynn Thomas in his work *RS Thomas: Serial Obsessive* chose this year to publish; the cover of his book shows RS as an intense birdwatcher in Llŷn. How many great artists are not obsessive? I have one other book that is a collaboration between my childhood friend, Peter Hope Jones and RS. Both were prime movers of the Bardsey Island Trust (Ynys Enlli) and their book *Between Sea and Sky* juxtaposes photographs of Enlli by Peter with quotes from poems by RS. Here you appreciate RS the naturalist. The latest issue of **Cambria** contains an article entitled *RS Thomas, one of the great love poets*. And last of all, the latest copy of Yr Enfys discusses a new Welsh book; *RS Thomas – Cleniach yn Gymraeg?* which suggests he was not an 'ogre from Wales' but more the nice man from Llyn. RS was indeed a controversial multidimensional person.

RS was born in Cardiff in 1913, the only child of Huw, a captain in the merchant navy and Margaret. In 1918 the family moved to Holyhead where his father worked on the Holyhead to Dublin ferry. He saw little of his father and grew up in an English speaking home dominated by his mother. He enjoyed the countryside, especially the seashore, playing with others, exploring and fishing. This was the birth of his love of nature. He studied Classics at the University College of North Wales, Bangor and then undertook his theological training at St. Michael's College, Llandaff, being ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church of Wales

in 1936. From then until his retirement in 1978, his ministry took him to a number of rural parishes in North Wales; the bleak beauty of the landscape and the hard lives of the peasant farmers became abiding themes in his poems. He wrote about his own people in a style comparable to the harsh terrain.

In 1940 he met Mildred (Elsi) Eldridge, an English artist to whom he wrote beautiful poems. They had one son, Gwydion, in 1945 and were married for 51 years until Elsi's death in 1991. From 1942 to 1954, he was the Rector of Manafon, near Welshpool in rural Montgomeryshire. There he began to study Welsh, although he later said to his regret that he learnt Welsh too late in life to write poetry in it. He did however write prose and produced two books. At Manafon he published his first three volumes of poetry, *The Stones of the Field*, *An Acre of Land* and *The Minister*. His break-through to a wider audience came in 1955 with the publication of *Song at the Year's Turning*. In his famous introduction John Betjamen wrote "the name which has the honour to introduce this fine poet to a wider public will be forgotten long before that of RS Thomas". RS wrote many poems – here are parts of five:

Welsh Landscape

To live in Wales is to be conscious
At dusk of the spilled blood
That went into the making of the wild
sky,
Dying the immaculate rivers
In all their courses.
It is to be aware,
Above the noisy tractor
And hum of the machine
Of strife in the strung woods
Vibrant with sped arrows.

You cannot live in the present,
At least not in Wales.
There is the language for instance,
The soft consonants
Strange to the ear.
There are cries in the dark at night
As owls answer the moon,
And thick ambush of shadows
Hushed at the fields' corners.
There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past.

Welsh History

We were a people taut for war; the hills
Were no harder, the thin grass
Clothed them more warmly than the coarse
Shirts our small bones.
We fought and were always in retreat,
Like snow thawing upon the slopes
Of Mynydd Mawr; and yet the stranger
Never found our ultimate stand
In the thick woods, declaiming verse
To the sharp prompting of the harp.
Our kings died, or they were slain
By the old treachery at the ford.
Our bards perished, driven from the halls
Of nobles by the thorn and bramble.

We were a people bred on legends,
Warming our hands at the red past.
The great were ashamed of our loose rags
Clinging stubbornly to the proud tree
Of blood and birth, our lean bellies
And mud houses were a proof
Of our ineptitude for life.
We were a people wasting ourselves
In fruitless battles for our masters,
In lands to which we had no claim,
With men for whom we felt no hatred.
We were a people, and are so yet.
When we have finished quarrelling for
crumbs
Under the table, or gnawing the bones
Of a dead culture, we will arise
And greet each other in a new dawn.

The Small Window

In Wales, there are jewels
To gather, but with the eye
Only, a hill lights up
Suddenly, a field trembles
With colour and goes out
In its turn; in one day
You can witness the extent
Of the spectrum and grow rich
With looking. Have care
The wealth is for the few
And chosen. Those who crowd
The small window dirty it
With their breathing, though sublime
And inexhaustible the view.

The Country Clergy

I see them working in old rectories
By the sun's light, by candle light.
Venerable men, their black cloth
A little dusty, a little green
With holy mildew.

They left no books,
Memorial to their lonely thought
In grey parishes: rather they wrote
On men's hearts and in the minds
Of young children sublime words
Too soon forgotten.
God in his time
Or out of time, will correct this.

A Marriage

We met
 under a shower
of bird-notes.
 Fifty years passed,
Love's moment
 in a world in
servitude to time.
 She was young;
I kissed with my eyes
 closed and opened
them on her wrinkles.

‘Come,’ said death,
choosing her as his
partner for
the last dance. And she,
who in life
had done everything
with a bird’s grace,
opened her bill now
for the shedding
of one sigh no
heavier than a feather.

RS was indeed a complex personality; I have only scratched the surface of his insights. I hope I have awakened your interest.

David Llewelyn Williams

Echoes of Yesteryear

Capt. Ieuan Lampshire Jones passed on to me the Society newsletter of October 1980, which in particular includes an account by Gwenfyl E. Jones, the Chair of the Local Committee of the 1980 National Gymanfa Ganu held in the Hotel Vancouver. Some items are worth mentioning again. I quote:

‘The Gymanfa Ganu Festival opened on Thursday, August 28th in grand style with a Fashion Show – “Ddoe a Heddiw” – Yesterday and Today. We saw the beautiful Welsh Costumes worn with such great delight and displayed so professionally, accompanied with excellent commentary given by Grace Thomas and Ann Roberts. The ‘Costume Choir’ gave us hiraeth and pride of being Welsh as they sang the Welsh folk songs. Congratulations and a thank you to Enid Lewis and Dorothy Walters for all their work preparing for the evening. The costumes would not have been possible were it not for the work of the designer, William S. Walker and the

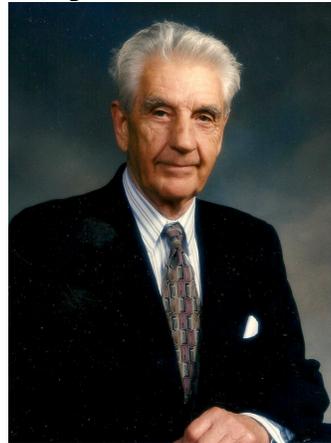
ladies who gave their talents sewing the costumes of “Yesteryear”.’

(Editor’s Note: This heralded the birth of the Cambrian Circle Singers.)

‘Saturday evening was the Gala Concert given by Côr Meibion Llanelli with guest artists Nansi Richards and David Tuck. This was an outstanding concert. Many of the letters received write of Mr. D. Eifion Thomas, the choir conductor and guest Gymanfa conductor, for his musical leadership, his first class performance as tenor soloist and the quality of his conducting. Mr. Clive Phillips, the organist, is to be congratulated of his outstanding performance at the concert and the Gymanfa. Throughout the weekend, the conductor, accompanist and choir gave the very best of themselves.’

(Editor’s note: We have enjoyed Eifion’s many talents at several of our events. Members also enjoyed Clive Phillips conducting Pontarddulais Male Voice Choir at Toronto this summer.)

Theophilus Garrod Jones



It is with considerable regret that I must report the passing of Theo Jones, who regularly attended our Service and our Gymanfa in our November weekend. In fact, he once described the weekend as

‘an inexpensive trip to Wales’. We had commented on his absence this year.

Theophilus Garrod Jones passed away on November 16th, 2013 at the age of 91. A funeral service was held on Friday, November 22 at Peace Lutheran Church in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

He was born in London, England on August 2nd, 1922 to Olive and Edgar Jones. He served in the British Army from 1941 to 1946 and emigrated to Canada in 1947. He worked in the pulp and paper industry in Thunder Bay until his retirement in 1987. He sold his property in Ontario and moved in 1988 to Abbotsford. He enjoyed dances in the Senior’s Community Hall where he met Ethel Walker and formed a great friendship that lasted for more than 20 years until her passing in 2008.

Theo (aka Ted) was a member of Peace Lutheran Church and served on its council for 6 years. He was a Life Member of our society and also a Life Member of the North American Festival of Wales. Reading Welsh literature and studying the Finnish language were his great passions. He enjoyed functions in the Scandinavian Centre and was a member of the Canadian Friends of Finland and the Vancouver Finlandia Club. A very cultured person!

Theo is survived by his two sisters, Pamela and Christine Jones in South Wales, his brother Geoffrey and niece Penny Murray (John) in New Zealand.

We will all miss his presence.

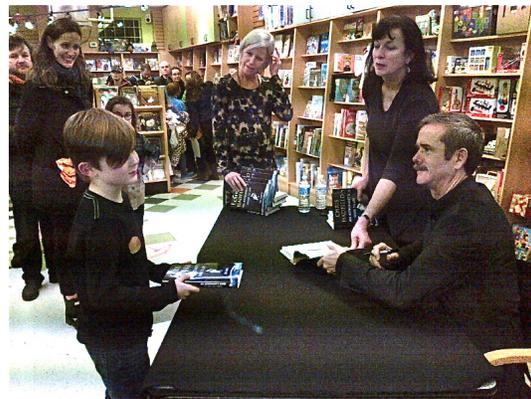
I am most grateful to LaVerne Roach for sending us a copy of his Funeral Service together with his obituary. D.L.I.W.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd

In his report on the NAFOW gathering in Toronto, our editor congratulated Hefina Phillips on being awarded the Heritage Medallion Award by the National Welsh-American Foundation for her distinguished service to the Welsh-American community. David also mentioned that Hefina is originally from the small village of Cwmgiedd in the Upper Swansea Valley. It is indeed a small village, boasting less than a thousand inhabitants and is part of the larger village of Ystradgynlais. Despite its size, Cwmgiedd’s output in terms of human achievement is truly impressive.

The latest high achiever to speak proudly of his childhood in Cwmgiedd is the new Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales who has chosen to adopt the title of Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd. Those of us with roots in Cwmgiedd will remember the Thomas family who lived in ‘Ty Roger’ at the top of the valley. Lord Thomas’ father, Roger E.L. Thomas, was a well known solicitor in Ystradgynlais and the future Lord Chief Justice attended Cynlais School, the local elementary school which my siblings and I also attended.

Eifion Williams



One of our young members, Hughie Williams, talking with Canadian Astronaut, Cmdr. Chris Hadfield.