

THE WELSH SOCIETY OF VANCOUVER

Mawrth
2006

March
2006

Gymdeithas Gymraeg Vancouver

Cambrian News

Society Newsletter - Cylchgrawn y Gymdeithas



James Memorial at Ffyns Angharad Park, Pontypridd

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WELSH SOCIETY, VANCOUVER

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The Cambrian News

From The Editor:

The memorial featured on the front page was designed by Sir William Goscombe John. It consists of two life-sized bronze figures representing Poetry and Music fixed in Blue Pennant stone. Between the bases is a profile of the heads of Evan and James James. There are inscriptions in Welsh and English; the English one reads:
In memory of Evan James and James James father and son, of Pontypridd, who, inspired by a deep and tender love of their native land united poetry to song and gave Wales her National Anthem, 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau'.

This year celebrates the 150th Anniversary of its composition, the words by Evan (Ieuan ap Iago) and the music by James (Iago ap Ieuan). Indeed Pontypridd has much to celebrate this year since it is also the 250th Anniversary of the old bridge and a well known native son, singer Thomas Jones (Woodward), was knighted in the New Year's Honours List.

On a sad note, the Council of the National Eisteddfod has decided to eliminate the ceremony welcoming the returning exiles, so John Pritchard will be the last Leader of the Overseas Welsh. I suppose this makes him 'John ein Llyw Olaf'!

I am particularly indebted to Maura McCay of the Celtic Connection for allowing me to abstract from Catholine Butler's piece on Carmarthen which included a St. David's Day message from Mark James. This is the fifth year that Catholine has interviewed the Mayor of a Welsh City and brought us their greetings on this important occasion.

David Llewelyn Williams

The Harp, its History, its Construction and its Music

On Friday evening, February 17th, members enjoyed a truly remarkable presentation by Dr Chris Waltham, Professor of Physics and Astronomy at U.B.C. After a research career studying neutrinos at the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory, a facility he was involved in developing, Chris turned his interests to the acoustics of the harp. This led him to learn to build his own harps with meticulous attention to detail.

Chris first discussed the history of the harp through museum photographs of its first known form in Baghdad, through Egypt to the varieties that emerged in Europe, for example the 16th century Arpa Cromatica (Bologna) and its 17th century triple harp variation. The physics was just quietly touched upon as he discussed his experiences in learning how to build his own harp. This harp is a copy of a lever harp by John Sebastian Morley (London c 1820) and has an overall height of 1.4 metres. Especially interesting was the choice of materials and the difficulty of finding appropriate wood in Canada! In fact the freshly felled birch for the vertical post was obtained from a relative's farm in Fort St. John. The construction of the sound box required knot free Sitka Spruce arranged so the fibres were aligned in a specific direction to give the acoustic properties. The strings are nylon for the high frequencies, gut for the medium ones and copper-wrapped steel for the low notes. Chris was asked how he was able to develop the necessary skill in construction. He responded that it was genetic! Both his father and grandfather were carpenters and he still uses tools with their stamps in this work. The harmonic content of the harp is produced by the coupling between the



strings through the motion of the sound box. Chris graphically demonstrated this with a stroboscopic picture of the strings when a C string was plucked and then he compared the sound of the same note on the harp and on the violin. To end the evening, Chris played a number of old recordings he had collected of music played on different types of harps. Finally, he played one of the pieces himself on his own harp. He invited others to try it out; one did so!

This was an evening with something for everyone. The physics was always there but the explanations were graphic and usually non-mathematical. The musical history was fascinating. Above all the skill and attention to detail in the harp's construction were remarkable. President Jane Byrne thanked Prof. Waltham for providing us with such an enlightening evening. Certainly all present were most appreciative. D.LI.W.

Carmarthenshire County: One of the Most Beautiful Valleys in Wales

Abstracted from an article by CATHOLINE BUTLER in *The Celtic Connection*
Carmarthenshire County in South West Wales is a beautiful holiday area, known as the Garden of Wales. Made up of unique villages, towns and communities, it is particularly noted for its stunning coastline, wonderful sandy beaches and coves. The Towy River is one of the best trout fishing rivers in the world and the Towy valley which is dotted with castles, is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful valleys in Britain.



Mark James the Chief Executive for Carmarthenshire recently spoke to *The Celtic Connection* from his office in the town of Carmarthen. His deep commitment was apparent as he described the wonders of his community. "Some counties have either got hills, or they have coasts or rivers, we've got all three," he said. One of the area's best known castles is Carreg Cennen and there are at least another four in the Towy Valley. Laugharne Castle is known for its associations with Dylan Thomas and is located near to the famous boathouse where he wrote *Under Milk Wood*. On the town of Carmarthen, James said it was a bustling, prosperous country town especially on market days and also had the distinction of a castle right in the town. In 2007 the Urdd Eisteddfod will take place in Carmarthenshire.



When asked about St. David's Day celebrations, he said "each of our primary schools will hold St. David's Day celebrations. I have four children myself, the youngest one being six, and the little girls will go dressed in Welsh costumes with tall black hats, checked scarves which they wrap around themselves along with skirts and black boots. The young boys will wear black or grey trousers, usually white shirts and a very bright waistcoat. They also wear neckerchiefs and flay caps which the old miners used to wear. The children perform Welsh songs and plays throughout the day." Photo shows the James children in costume: (L-R) Rachel, Christopher (wearing a Welsh rugby shirt) and Naomi.

In closing, Mark James offers a Welsh greeting in both English and his native language to all those who are celebrating St. David's Day in North America:

St. David's Day Greetings

The County of Carmarthenshire, deep in idyllic South West Wales, with its beaches, beautiful estuaries, mountainous national parks and valleys carved by classic rivers is one of the UK's best kept secrets. But it's much more than the landscape and the beautiful coastline, Carmarthenshire's wonderful cultural heritage and timeless values truly touch a human cord in the rush and crush of this modern world. Our beautiful towns and villages, retain a character that is becoming more and more difficult to find

elsewhere with farms, market day, festivals and country fairs, it brings the best of Welsh life and culture.

On St. David's Day we celebrate all that is good about our heritage and culture. It is a time to look back on our proud history and look forward with real excitement and optimism as our county continues to develop as a great destination to visit and live.

To all our friends in Canada and America, I wish you a very happy St. David's Day.

– Mark James, Chief Executive Carmarthenshire County Council

Cyfarchion Dydd Gwyl Dewi

Mae Sir Gaerfyrddin, yn Ne-orllewin Cymru, ymhlith rhai o gyfrinachau mwyaf Prydain, gyda'i thraethau mawr, ei haberoedd prydferth, ei pharciau cenedlaethol mynyddig, ynghyd â'i dyffrynnoedd a'i hafonydd hynod. Ond mae gan Sir Gaerfyrddin lawer mwy i'w gynnig na'i thirwedd a'i harfordir hyfryd, gan fod ganddi dreftadaeth ddiwylliannol gyfoethog a gwerthoedd dynol nad ydynt mor amlwg ym mhrysurdeb y byd sydd ohono heddiw. Mae ein trefi a'n pentrefi hardd wedi llwyddo i gadw eu cymeriad unigryw, ac mae'r ffermydd, y dyddiau marchnad, y gwyliau a'r ffeiriau gwledig yn cynrychioli'r hyn sydd orau ym mywyd a diwylliant Cymru.

Ar Ddydd Gwyl Dewi rydym yn dathlu popeth sydd yn dda yn ein treftadaeth a'n diwylliant. Mae'n ddiwrnod pryd rydym yn bwrw golwg yn ôl dros ein hanes ac yn ymfalchïo ynddo, yn ogystal ag edrych ymlaen yn gadarnhaol a chyda brwdfrydedd wrth i'n sir barhau i ddatblygu fel lle gwych i fyw ynddi ac i ymweld â hi.

Dymunaf Ddydd Gwyl Dewi hapus i'n holl gyfeillion yng Nghanada ac America.

– Gan Mark James, Prif Weithredwr Cyngor Sir Caerfyrddin

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March Events

Wednesday March 1st

St. David's Day celebration at 7.30 pm
in the Lower Hall, Cawl Cenin, Welsh
Cakes, Pikelets, Music and Poetry.

Saturday March 4th

Annual St. David's Day Dinner
Doors open 6 pm Dinner served at 7 pm
Tickets from Gaynor Evans @ \$35 each
Phone 604-271-3134

Sunday March 5th

Cambrian Circle Singers 10 am
St. David's Church, Tsawwassen

Sunday March 12th

Church Service and Te Bach 11 am

Wednesday March 15th

Executive Meeting 7.30 pm

Friday March 24th

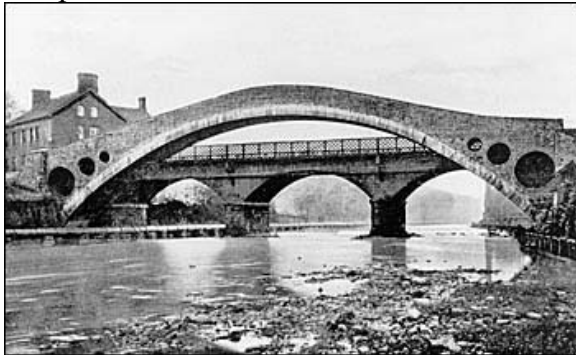
Cambrian Circle Singers 7.30 pm
Augustine House, Ladner

Saturday March 25th

Vancouver Orpheus Choir 7.30 pm
Langley Community School

The Bridge on the River Taff

William Edwards was commissioned in 1746 to build a bridge over the river Taff at Pontypridd. It is interesting to note that William Edwards' father was drowned fording the river Taff when William was 7 years old, so perhaps he had a special motivation to succeed. The first attempt, a three arch structure, was washed away in 28 months; the second and third attempts at single span structures collapsed until finally Edwards hit upon the idea of creating three large tunnels of different sizes (9ft., 6ft. and 3ft. diameter) through each of the sides to reduce the overall weight that had to be supported by the arch. This design proved successful and the bridge was finally completed in 1756.



The picture shows the old bridge and behind it a modern road bridge. Pontypridd will be celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the William Edwards' bridge this year. In fact the town was called Newbridge from 1756 until 1856.

The Leek and St. David

*That reverend British saint, in zealous ages past
To contemplation lived, and did so truly fast,
As he did only drink what crystal Hodney yields
And fed upon the leeks he gathered in the fields.
In memory of whom, in each revolving year
The Welshmen on his day that sacred herbe do
wear.*

Michael Drayton (1563 – 1631)

The Red Dragon Pub - Vietnam



This photo was taken by Susan Jamieson – McLarnon of the Red Dragon Pub sign in Sapa, a small hill town north of Hanoi (overnight train trip and two hours bus ride) and very near to the Chinese border. It claims to serve *English* pub food! Pity!

Congratulations

Congratulations to our member, Dr. Peter Byrne, Emeritus Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of British Columbia, upon being awarded the Geoffrey G. Meyerhoff Award by the Soil Mechanics and Foundations Division of the Canadian Geotechnical Society in recognition of his outstanding contributions to soil mechanics and foundation engineering. A Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada, Peter is one of the foremost experts on earthquakes and soil liquefaction.

The Holy Grail (from icWales)

The Da Vinci Code might name Scotland as the home of the Holy Grail, but Grail expert Dr Juliette Wood of Cardiff University said theories linking the Grail to Scotland were relatively new compared to the claims which Wales has on the ancient relic, which stretch back to the 14th century.

The Holy Grail is believed to be the cup which Christ drank from at the Last Supper and is thought to have magical powers, but its location, and whether it ever actually existed, has captured the imagination of adventurers throughout history, from the Knights of the Round Table to the imaginary Indiana Jones. Stories suggesting the existence of a Grail first appeared in the 12th century and according to Dr Wood, who specialises in Welsh folklore and Celtic literature, evidence of the relic having travelled to Wales can be traced back to the 1300s. First reference to the Grail having travelled to Wales can be found in the story of Peredur the Son of Evrawc, which appears in the Mabinogion. In the story a knight, Peredur of Wales, sets out on a quest to find the Grail, although when he does it appears not as a shining beacon, but in the form of his cousin's head on a platter in a pool of blood. Other theories which link the Grail to Wales include an ancient Celtic myth called the Nanteos Cup, about a sacred life-giving cauldron. It is thought to have been the basis for many of the later Grail stories, and was found near Aberystwyth. It is believed to have healing powers.

Dr Wood admits that she doesn't believe the Grail ever existed but she said the legends and myths which have grown up surrounding it are an important part of Welsh cultural history. She said, "I don't think there are any academics who would argue the Holy Grail actually existed. It's a medieval fiction that developed in the context of Christianity. "But there are a lot of things, although nothing concrete, which link it back to Wales. It's a very interesting part of Welsh heritage."

Dr Juliette Wood gave a lecture, The Holy Grail in Wales, on January 25 at Cardiff University's Centre for Lifelong Learning.

Hawaii the place to learn Medieval Welsh (from T. Williams, Western Mail, Feb. 8)

HAWAII and Honolulu may seem a world away from Wales on a chill February morning. But a professor at the US state's main university is forging an unlikely connection between Wales and Hawaii - by teaching Medieval Welsh! Professor Kathryn Klingebiel is currently teaching the intriguing course on a sun-drenched campus more than 7,000 miles away from Wales. The language expert, who was born in San Francisco and has no family ties with Wales, started learning modern and medieval Welsh in the 1980s while studying for her PhD at the University of California. "I wanted to learn Welsh as a good example of a verb-subject-object language, as a complement to Latin (which has the verb at the end of the sentence) and subject-verb-object languages such as French and other Romance languages."

Ms Klingebiel, who has visited Aberystwyth and published works on Welsh verbs, added, "When I was hired to teach French at the University of Hawaii in 1991, one of the graduate students asked me if I could also offer a Welsh course as a sideline. I said yes, delighted to share one of my passions. It became a permanent course in 1995 under the title Masterpieces of Medieval Welsh. The course has been offered nine times in 15 years and has attracted students from far beyond my own department, including doctoral students from English and History, American Studies, Library Science, Linguistics and even East Asian Languages." Ms Klingebiel says it was that very remoteness from all things Welsh that drew students into trying "something new and different". She believes the appeal of the Arthurian myth, and its connections with medieval Welsh literature such as the Mabinogion, was another big factor in getting students to undertake the task of learning a hitherto unknown language in just four months. The course involves a few weeks of intensive language training through lectures, handouts, internet work and folk songs. Ms Klingebiel, added, "The medieval literature of Wales is endlessly fascinating, as attested by its ability to attract students in the middle of the Pacific."

Dai Smith's top 10 alternatives to Dylan Thomas (from the Guardian)

Dai Smith is Research Chair in the Cultural History of Wales at **Swansea University** and series editor of the Library of Wales, a Welsh Assembly government initiative designed to bring back into print classic writing about Wales written in English.

The series is published by Parthian Books of Cardigan and the first five titles, all with new forewords by contemporary Welsh writers, are available in January 2006.

They are:

So long, Hector Bebb by Ron Berry (1970)

Border Country by Raymond Williams (1960)

The Dark Philosophers by Gwyn Thomas (1946)

Cwmardy and We Live by Lewis Jones (1937; 1939)

Country Dance by Margiad Evans (1932)

“Of course, it's not Dylan's fault that his bible black and ugly lovely, hymned and heron-priested (omigod the word-spinning virus has already struck) suburban and sunny Wales has become everyone else's. After all he did say “Land of my Fathers! My fathers can keep it”, Only admiring ex-presidents who don't listen and troubadours from Minnesota called Bob take on his name as did bucktoothed magic rabbits and now, already branding a Welsh ale and a literary centre, it is to grace Britain's newest literary prize – oodles of dosh if you are under 30 and write from anywhere in the world in English with a SAE to Swansea – so it's time for us Welsh to put him in his place. Or rather to tell the world, as he well knew, that the Wales of the last century – industrial, modern, secular, immigrant, befuddled and rebellious, big shouldered and short-arsed –

was something more than Cwmdonkin Drive and adolescent wet dreams.

Writing from Wales in English has been as distinctive and complex as England's nearest and least understood neighbours, the Welsh themselves. So, new readers, start here and remember, if you enter the Milk Wood you will not Pass Go.”

1. Dai Country (1973) and The Former Miss Merthyr Tydfil (1976) by Alun Richards

These two wickedly astringent collections of short stories cast a baleful but knowing eye on the snobbery and pretensions of the Welsh middle classes.

2. In a Green Tree by Alun Lewis (1948)

A post-war compilation of the letters and stories of the lost leader of Welsh writing, mostly known as a war poet when he died in Burma (1915 -1944).

3. In place of Fear by Aneurin Bevan (1952)

The fragmentary but filigree political testament of Wales' most vital political figure.

4. A Few Selected Exits by Gwyn Thomas (1968)

Gwyn Thomas (1913-81) managed to write some of the most savage comedy about some of the most socially ransacked coal gulches on earth.

5. The Selected Poems of John Ormond (1987)

John Ormond (1923-1990) knew Dylan – all too well, he once concluded, as he burned his own first efforts – and had to shake off the young ranter-at-the-moon to find his particular voice. When he did it was warm and humane with no false grace notes of sentimentality. A poet to explore, and to return to again and again.

(For the rest of Dai Smith's choices go to books.guardian.co.uk/top10s/top10/)