

## EASTER CONFERENCE 2010 WALES AND OXFORD

This very successful conference was held on the weekend of April 9-11<sup>th</sup> 2010 and was attended by 49 residents and 12 non-resident members. It was based, as was fitting, on Jesus College where our welcome as a Welsh association was particularly warm. Thanks are due to the domestic bursar, Ms Rosemary Frame, for making special arrangements to accommodate the party since the seventeenth century buildings (and also some of the more recent ones) presented several problems for a group which included some who found ancient staircases rather difficult. Very special thanks should also go to Professor Thomas Charles-Edwards, professor of Celtic in the University and a Fellow of Jesus, who provided useful liaison, gave two lectures and facilitated our visit to the Bodleian Library to see a special exhibition of some of the best-known Welsh manuscripts held in Oxford. We were granted the privilege of this private viewing through the kindness of the Librarian of Special Collections, Dr Martin Kaufmann. The general arrangements for the conference were made by Frances Lynch Llewellyn and she is grateful for the help of Mary Dodd and Keith Dallimore on Friday afternoon as delegates were arriving. They ensured that everyone was able to find the exhibition, museum, church or college that they wished to visit before dinner.

After dinner, which was served in the Fellows' Dining Room and in the ground floor Harold Wilson Rooms, the conference was given a most appropriate opening when Prof Robert Evans, the Regius Professor of History, gave an overview of the links between Wales and Oxford, introducing a number of the themes which would be developed further in lectures on the following days. This lecture, which was introduced by the Chairman of Trustees, Prof Muriel Chamberlain, was a wide-ranging discussion of Oxford's impact on Welsh students and society and the Welsh impact upon Oxford. He ended with a comparative survey, which included many thought-provoking statistics, of the major European universities and the impact there of minority / foreign groups. He concluded that no European situation was exactly comparable to the unique alienship of Welsh students within Oxford.

On Saturday morning Daniel Huws, lately curator of manuscripts at the National Library of Wales, gave an introduction to the Welsh manuscripts in Oxford prior to the visit to the Bodleian. He spoke of how the college and university collections had developed as individual collectors had striven to save mediaeval manuscripts from the tsunami which was sweeping away the monastic libraries in the sixteenth century. He felt that the digital revolution and the 'electronic promise' may be about to cause a similarly destructive wave in the near future. He then gave a brief commentary on each of the nine manuscripts which would be on view in the Bodleian. These were: Rawl. B 464 a collection on NE Welsh topography in the hand of Edward Lhuyd and others; Rawl.C 821 Latin redaction D of the Laws c. 1300 with painted carpet page and crucifixion; Welsh e.1 *Cywyddau*, many by Daffydd ap Gwilym, copied by 3 known scribes; Welsh f.9 a small roll containing an actor's part in a Welsh morality play (probably 18<sup>th</sup> cent.); Jesus 15 *Simwnt Fychan, Pum Llyfr Kerddwriaeth* in his own hand with annotations by William Salesbury; Jesus 20 A miscellany c. 1400 from South Wales and still in its rare original binding; Jesus 111 The famous Red Book of Hergest c. 1400 – the largest surviving collection of Welsh verse and prose; Jesus 119 *Llyfr yr Ancr*, an anthology of religious prose written in 1346; Jesus 141 a compilation of British history books (*Brut y Brenhinedd* etc) all in the hand of Gutun Owain 1499.

Because of the numbers, the logistics of this visit were quite complex and demanded precision timing on the part of the three groups who were to arrive 35 minutes apart. Some had to forego coffee but others could have an extended break. Daniel Huws and Professor Thomas Charles-Edwards who were available to all groups to answer questions got no respite! All came back to Jesus College at 12.00 when Prof Antony Carr spoke on Welsh students in medieval Oxford. He outlined the context of the foundation of universities in Europe and in Britain and discussed the curriculum and the type of careers to which it gave access. He gave details of the known Welsh students, then

attending various small informal halls in Oxford, and their subsequent careers back home, mainly in the church or the law. The Glyndwr Revolt had a considerable impact on Welsh students then at Oxford but it is doubtful whether Glyndwr's proposal for two universities in Wales would have proved practical, since it is unlikely that there would have been sufficient employment within Wales for their graduates.

After lunch in the Great Hall, Dr Brinley Jones continued the story of Welsh scholars in Oxford in his own inimitable style with a survey of the situation in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. He provided entertaining sketches of notable individuals recorded in the many personal memoirs of the time, enlivened by fascinating asides on his own experiences of *academia*. He spoke of the grammarian and translator, William Salesbury and, on the other side of the Reformation divide, of Gruffydd Robert who left for Milan where he still continued to write in Welsh; of the learned Dr John Davies of Mallwyd and of Richard Davies and many more who had an impact, both in Oxford and at home in Wales.

In the second half of the afternoon delegates were free to visit museums or other sites in Oxford. Many took advantage of the beautiful spring weather and took tea on the new roof-garden restaurant at the Ashmolean Museum after a brief spin round the newly displayed galleries. At 5.00pm everyone returned to Jesus for the final lecture of the day: Dr John Morgan Guy of Lampeter University on the impact of the Oxford Movement on church practice within Wales. He began by outlining the origin of the Tractarian Movement in Oxford, where several Jesus Fellows were involved. He then moved to the nexus of friendship and cousinage amongst certain landowning graduates in Wales which led to the building of new style churches on their estates and the selection of clergy who developed new forms of worship. Churches in Llangorwen, Aberdare, Dolgellau and Llanfairfechan began to use Gregorian chant, to have trained choirs and daily services. In architecture the new 'High Churchmanship' was recognisable in stone altars and the eagle lectern. He spoke in detail about Stephen Glynne of Harwarden, Robert Raikes of Llangasty and the Talbots at Margam. This family had a major impact, especially the two sisters who inherited the wealth in the second generation and were major builders of churches in both rural and urban contexts.

Dinner was held in the Great Hall after the lecture and, since there was no further official business for the delegates, it was a relaxed evening. The following morning began with coffee at 10.00am and there were two lectures before lunch. The first was a collaborative effort between Prof Thomas Charles-Edwards (with the Jesus College archivist) and Heather James and Edna Dale-Jones from Carmarthen, looking at the College estates in Carmarthen. The study of college estates, many of which had been sold in 1990s and their documentation distributed to local archive offices, had the potential for identifying broad economic trends in various parts of the country and also providing details of management practice in particular counties or towns. In some instances the conditions of the benefactions influenced policies within the college. Prof Charles-Edwards provided an introduction to the College finances which were initially meagre but received a boost in the 17<sup>th</sup> century during the Principalship of Leoline Jenkins. From 1640-1840 donations of Welsh land became important and notable tied scholarships (such as the Meyrick ones) made the College more Welsh. Several notable Principals had come from Carmarthenshire and Heather James and Edna Dale-Jones concentrated on the bequests of Richard Blome and of Edmond Meyrick who had come from Bala to be domestic chaplain at Golden Grove and later vicar of St Peter's Carmarthen and left his houses in the town to foster education. The history of these properties under the stewardship of the College was a useful index of the town's fluctuating social and economic history.

The next lecture by Professor Huw Pryce of Bangor University looked at the influence of Oxford on Welsh historiography, especially through the experience of Sir John Lloyd whose 1911 *History of Wales* influenced all subsequent professional historians. There had been previous works on Welsh

history, including the influential *Historie of Cambria* by David Powel in 1584, but these lacked the coherence and critical approach that were hallmarks of Lloyd's book. Lloyd had been an undergraduate at Aberystwyth, itself founded under a strong Oxford/English cultural influence, where he prepared for entry to Lincoln College, Oxford; he graduated with a First in Modern History in Oxford in 1885. He returned to Aberystwyth as a lecturer before moving to Bangor as registrar and lecturer in Welsh history, and then became professor of History there in 1899. Teaching within Oxford University was entirely English in orientation but the complexion of his social life remained Welsh and he was influenced by the Oxford dons who were nonconformists and also by his friendship with O M Edwards who, through teaching and through writing and publishing magazines, was a deliberate populariser of all things Welsh. Oxford in the 1880s gave little training in research or contact with original sources but Lloyd developed his own researches there and when he returned to Wales the aura of his Oxford success authenticated the renewal of specifically Welsh studies.

After lunch in the Great Hall the party briefly visited the recently restored Fellows Library with Prof Charles-Edwards. This seventeenth century library contains the books collected during the earliest period of the college's history and demonstrates the range of the curriculum and the interests of the Fellows.

The two lectures in the afternoon dealt with two very different aspects of the place of the Welsh language in the university. Professor Charles-Edwards spoke on the study of the Celtic languages in Oxford. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Edward Lhuyd had been a notable philologist and also a student of early inscriptions. From that period until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Celtic, Germanic and Sanskrit were all studied as inter-related languages. Lhuyd had showed that Irish was related to the other Celtic languages and so established the notion of Celtic as a language family. From the late-18th century it became clear that Sanskrit was related to Greek and Latin, but Celtic, with variation at the beginning rather than the end of words, was thought to be non-Indo-European, until the work of Bopp demonstrated otherwise. From that time, with a great deal of work being done in Germany, there was pressure for a chair of Celtic languages in Britain, the region holding most surviving Celtic languages. But this was not achieved until 1877 with the election of John Rhys, previously a schoolmaster at Rhos y Bol, Anglesey, as Jesus Professor of Celtic. Rhys had very wide interests in inscriptions, antiquities, literature and folklore, as his many contributions to *Archaeologia Cambrensis* reveal. In 1886 he was invited to examine the Manx inscriptions when the Cambrians were asked by the Governor to report on the antiquities of the island, and he remained closely involved with Manx affairs. Celtic lectureships were established in Liverpool and Manchester in the 1900s but the First World War (and perhaps also the Easter Rising) was a setback for the subject in England. Rhys died in 1915 and his successor was not elected until 1921. Subsequent professors have been less polymathic and have had differing specialities: Old Irish, mediaeval Welsh poetry, Continental Celtic. The lecture ended on a sombre note since the future of the Chair is uncertain, as is all language teaching. A full endowment of the post needs £3 million at the University's own cost which makes it extremely vulnerable.

Bruce Griffiths who had been an undergraduate at Jesus studying French in the late 1950s spoke about the history of 'The Dafydd' and his own experience of its meetings. Cymdeithas Dafydd ap Gwilym was founded in 1886 as an informal discussion society for Welsh-speaking students. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Oxford had been exclusively Anglican but the removal of the Test Act in 1871 had brought in new Welsh blood and the 1880s saw a greater use of Welsh in the college and the foundation of a number of Welsh societies, most connected with O M Edwards and his friends, many of whom lived near Clarendon Villas, which was also the home of Prof John Rhys. The Dafydd was not a political society, though it discussed contemporary Welsh affairs; its meetings were social and self-educational occasions with talks, poems and singing and a good deal of leg-pulling, smoking and some horse-play. The meetings, normally once a week, took place in private rooms in various

colleges and were attended by members from a wide range of backgrounds and often with little formal Welsh education. Everything was conducted in Welsh – that was the essential link and the key to its success. Several English-language Welsh societies, Old Bangorians, Old Breconians etc, had existed from time to time, but none had survived; while the Dafydd is now the third oldest society (after the Union and the Rowing Club) still meeting in the university. Prof John Rhys had been a faithful Senior Member up to his death in 1915, but in 1919 the society had to be re-established by Ifor ab Owain Edwards, son of the founder. During the early years, members, led by John Rhys, Owen Edwards and Edward Morgan, had advocated the reform of Welsh orthography; this campaign was widely reported in the Welsh press, meeting much hostility, but was later vindicated by the reforms made in 1928. This seems to have been the one public impact of the society, though nearly all the notable Welsh students in Oxford, future bishops, politicians and academics, were enthusiastic members at one time or another. The lecture ended with a moving account of Dr Griffiths' own experience of the Dafydd as a bewildered Welsh student adrift in a sea of unfamiliar Englishness coming, for one evening a week, to a comfortable oasis of camaraderie. He also added several anecdotes about well-known contemporaries now more circumspect in their behaviour!

After tea and a vote of thanks to the organisers of the conference, delegates left to make their way home, or to enjoy another night in Oxford.