

THE FRIEND

Friends of the Welsh Books Council Newsletter

Welcome

As another edition of The Friend appears I am glad that in a short time it has become a natural part of the Friends' work, and that the Friends themselves have become just a natural part of the wider Books Council. I would like to thank all of you who have worked to achieve this, and especially our first secretary, Jenkin Morgan Griffiths, who is giving up his position this year. As a former librarian, Jenkin shared his wide knowledge of the book world with the Friends and I would like to thank him personally for his contribution in laying a firm foundation for our future work.

We also hope that you as members appreciate the packs that we send you, giving you the latest information about the booktrade in Wales.

Please note our annual meeting with our special guest this year, the poet Gillian Clarke. This is one of the highlights of the Friends' year and I would like as many as possible of us to support this event. It will be an opportunity to hear one of our foremost writers discussing her work, and also for us all to meet up once again. I look forward to seeing you there.

ALUN CREUNANT DAVIES
Chair,
Friends of the Welsh Books Council



APPEAL FOR NEW MEMBERS

As you are probably aware, the Friends have just over 400 members, and we are always eager to gain more members. Our aim is to achieve a total of 500 members as soon as possible.

Although we regularly send out invitation letters, it must be admitted that the response is rather slow, and we feel that personal contact is the best way of explaining the benefit of becoming a member of the Friends of the Books Council.

Would it therefore be possible for each current member to recruit a new member? We are sure that a number of people would appreciate the benefits, including the regular members' pack on the latest developments in the booktrade in Wales.

If you feel you could attract new members, please contact Elwyn Jones at the Books Council in Aberystwyth (01970) 624151 or by e-mail elwyn.jones@wbc.org.uk

Annual General Meeting

2.30 pm Saturday, 11 May
St Paul's Centre, Aberystwyth

Professor M Wynn Thomas,
Swansea, in conversation with
Gillian Clarke on her life and work



We shall also be electing new officers and members to the Friend's Steering Committee

Followed by tea

STEERING COMMITTEE

At the next meeting of the Friends to be held on Saturday, 11 May at Aberystwyth, you will have the opportunity to elect new officers and committee members to serve for a period of three years. We have already received nomination papers on behalf of several members, and the voting papers

will be distributed at the meeting.

Apart from the Secretary, Jenkin Morgan Griffiths, the other officers are open for re-election, and we would like to take this opportunity of thanking the Secretary for his service to the Friends and for his support to the Books Council over the years.

Literary Publishers (Wales)

Welsh publishers working together

How often have we heard that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts? This is the aim of Literary Publishers (Wales) Ltd – a marketing consortium of six publishers from Wales who all publish, to a greater or lesser degree, in the field of creative writing from Wales. We owe the existence of LPW to the Arts Council of Wales, specifically to Tony Bianchi who encouraged the publishers to work together.

The criteria for membership of that initial group, the fore-runner of LPW, was therefore those publishers in receipt of ACW production grants for creative writing in English. We shared the problem that whilst we were publishing in English, with an enormous potential market, we were competing against the very largest global publishers. In addition, we were competing with the notion that creative writing from Wales was 'local interest' with the result that Emyr Humphreys's novels could be found in the 'local interest' section in a bookshop in Aberystwyth, whereas an English author of lesser stature would be found in 'literature'.

Initial co-operative efforts included the appointment of a London publicist, and the building of a joint mailing list (administered by the Welsh Books Council) through the distribution of questionnaire postcards in our books. In order to obtain grants towards our marketing efforts it was necessary to formalise the relationship between the publishers and Literary Publishers (Wales) Ltd was born. It currently has six members: Gomer, Honno, Parthian, Planet, Seren and University of Wales Press.

There are two main examples of co-operative efforts that could not have been undertaken by an individual publisher. Firstly, LPW's successful lottery bid for a series of book promotions currently known as 'Summer Reading': book launches, readings and other events held throughout Wales during summer. Secondly, the successful joint bid by LPW and the Welsh Books Council to obtain ACW funding for a trade representative to promote English-language creative writing from Wales. This scheme in particular has resulted in an unprecedented level of co-operation between the Books Council and some of its publishers. Crucially it has enabled the Council to share commercially sensitive information that empowers the publishers to support the work of the Council's representatives. Indeed the sheer volume of data it produced necessitated a training day, organised by LPW and held at Castell Brychan, to help publishers analyse and interpret the information.

LPW's members have common aims, but we are competitors and do not always share the same agenda. It can be galling to work co-operatively and promote a title which you might have lost to another publisher, or indeed turned down on the grounds of quality. Nevertheless I am constantly impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of our members. Perhaps because there is one goal above all which we share: survival. Publishing is a capital-intensive global business. The market is increasingly controlled on the one hand by large publishers and on the other by large bookselling chains. Our strategy to enable us to be taken seriously in the marketplace and achieve critical mass is therefore to work together.

Richard Houdmont

My Favourite Books

Members of The Friends are invited to discuss their favourite books. This is the selection of Gwenan Creunant of Aberystwyth.

Under Milk Wood, Dylan Thomas
The Sky over Wales, Siân James
Private Faces, Siân Phillips
Aberystwyth Mon Amour, Malcolm Pryce
Collected Poems, R S Thomas



I've no doubt that my first real experience of 'Anglo-Welsh literature' was studying *Under Milk Wood* in school, and being totally enthralled by the sounds and the connotations of the words and passages. It still holds a magic very difficult to surpass.

Two Siâns are amongst the authors which I have recently enjoyed their autobiographical works: *The Sky over Wales* affectionately recalling the childhood of Siân James in south Ceredigion, and *Private Faces*, Siân Phillip's colourful and touching account of her early days in Gwaun Cae Gurwen.

I have also just read *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, by Malcolm Pryce, a black comedy which I found hilarious in parts, and as I walk

around Aberystwyth, many a street and landmark have now taken on a completely new perspective!

The Collected Poems of R S Thomas was a most acceptable gift a few years ago, and one which provides an endless source of pleasure and awe.

Our Sisters' Land, Travels In an Old Tongue, the novels of Emyr Humphreys, and the various works of Jan Morris are also amongst the favourites, but these might be the choice of yesterday or tomorrow. As would be the entertaining *Wales in Quotation*, edited by Meic Stephens, where W J Gruffydd is quoted as saying in 1927: "And as for Anglo-Welsh literature, I blush for my country at seeing any of it in print"!!

PROMOTING BOOKS OVERSEAS

Lyn Lewis Dafis, the editor of *The Friends* spoke to Phil Davies, the Book Council's Head of Marketing regarding their plans to promote books from Wales abroad.

As part of its drive to give Wales a higher profile throughout the world, the National Assembly for Wales is supporting one of the Welsh Books Council's initiatives to promote books from Wales abroad. The new project will be up and running in a few weeks' time when Bridget Shine, the newly appointed Marketing Officer (Overseas), takes up her post.

Head of Marketing at the Council, Phil Davies, speaks with enthusiasm about the scheme: "It's our intention to make sure that books from Wales are available in the bookshops of some of the world's major cities. At the moment books from Wales find their way to these places only as orders. If this initiative succeeds it should be possible for book buyers in the chosen cities to see a broad selection of books from and about Wales."

The emphasis is on the promotion and sale of English-language books, and therefore one

market to be targeted will be those regions where there is a tradition of buying books in English – north America, Australasia and the Scandinavian countries. Also major European cities will be included in the first wave. Phil Davies adds that there will also be an opportunity to promote Welsh-language books: "We are very keen to make sure that books in Welsh will also be available, especially in those places where Celtic studies or Welsh courses are taught at local universities, or where there is a proven demand from Welsh speakers living abroad."

"Our aim is to promote all kinds of books from Wales – history, factual, as well as the best of our literature – in those places where there is a Welsh connection. That connection could be in the form of the Welsh Diaspora or an Arts Council sponsored festival of Welsh arts and culture in a particular city, or a publicity drive by the Wales Tourist Board, or a sporting event. Wherever and whenever those opportunities arise

we hope that books from Wales will feature prominently in the local bookshops at that time."

An example of such an event is the annual Gymanfa Ganu held in different cities throughout the United States and Canada. It is probably the most important "Welsh" event in the calendar of North America. The Books Council has already taken the initiative in book promotion at the Gymanfa Ganu. Last year a marketing officer from the Council, Elwyn Williams, attended the event in San José, California.

"It's important that books from Wales are not overlooked in the international market simply because people don't know about them or find it difficult to buy them. Other small nations, such as Ireland and Iceland, are already promoting their publishing industry abroad and investing in ensuring that their 'products' are available in the marketplace. The Books Council is playing its role in ensuring that Wales takes its place in that market," said Pil Davies.

World Book Day 2002

It seems that almost the whole of Wales was part of the celebration of World Book Day this year! In order to ensure the Day's success, the Welsh Books Council worked in partnership with a large number of organisations, including the Wales Pre-school Playgroups Association, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, Tenovus, Oxfam, Barnardo, the Red Cross, Hope House Hospice, the National Federation of the Women's Institute in Wales, Merched y Wawr, the National Assembly, BBC and S4C, Arriva, universities and colleges, libraries and schools, local authorities, the CBI, the Museum of Welsh Life at St. Fagans, the Welsh Academi, and a number of businesses as well.

The Day gained a great deal of media attention, from the 'papurau bro' to the national broadcasters, and messages of support for the Day were received from a number of celebrities including Bryn Terfel, Huw Edwards, Tanni Grey-Thompson, Carol Vorderman, Mathew Rhys, Philip Pullman, and Jane Davidson, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning. These messages can be viewed on the World Book Day web pages of the Welsh Books Council's website, www.wbc.org.uk.

A large number of bilingual resources were produced for libraries, booksellers, schools, 'cylchoedd meithrin' and playgroups; several competitions were organised for schools and children, adults and the early-years sector, and book bites from contemporary Welsh-language and Welsh-interest books were e-mailed to workplaces and organisations throughout Wales.

Amongst the highlights of the celebrations were two events that



World Book Day lecture at the National Assembly: Dr Lionel Madden, Chairman of the Books Council; Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning; Professor M Wynn Thomas; Cynog Dafis, Chairman of the Assembly's Education Committee, and Gwerfyl Pierce Jones, Director of the Books Council.

took place in the National Assembly building during the week. Organised by the Welsh Books Council, a very memorable lecture, entitled 'Monica Lewinsky and Me', was delivered by Professor M Wynn Thomas, and a session organised by the Welsh Academi featured a very special poem by Gwyn Thomas and its translations into a number of Welsh dialects, both English and Welsh, as well as into a number of the foreign languages that are spoken within Wales.

Wales was buzzing with activities on World Book Day 2002 – it was most definitely an occasion to remember!

Supporting the Welsh book trade

An interview with Richard Owen from the Books Council's Publishing Grants Department

1981 may seem a long way off now, but it was a year of great significance in the life of the Welsh Books Council. That year saw the Council taking on the responsibility for allocating grants for publishing leisure books in Welsh for adults and children. In order to do this work properly grant officers were appointed, one of who was Richard Owen from Llanfechell, Anglesey, who is still working there today. "When I first started we administered a grant of around £285,000 annually", he said. Today, along with fellow officer Ifana Savill and assistant Jane Hopkins, "we oversee a grant of nearly £624,000 received from the National Assembly through the Welsh Language Board."

Since joining the Council, after two years as an assistant lecturer in the Department of Welsh at University College, Dublin, Richard has played some part in the publishing of the vast majority of Welsh-language books. "Even though I say it myself, the number and quality of books supported from the publishing grant is phenomenal. We manage to make comparatively little go a long way."

For those who are not knowledgeable about the situation of minority or smaller languages, the idea of grants for publishing books may seem like an extravagance, but Richard insists that they are necessary. "One thing is certain, without the grant the Welsh-language publishing industry would be in a very very much poorer state today. Grants were first introduced in the 1950s when it was recognized that economies of scale in publishing worked against very small markets such as ours, and that if the industry was to survive it had to be helped in some way. Of course, the Council is not the only body which gives support to publishing in the Welsh language: literary publications are aided by the Arts Council, and educational publishing is supported by the government and local authority agencies."

I asked Richard about the role of the Publishing Grants Department within the Books Council itself and he answered



Richard Owen

enthusiastically, "It was a stroke of genius to make the grant allocation for leisure publications part of the Council's functions because, in the Welsh-language book market, where even the smallest changes can have a very detrimental effect, every stakeholder within the industry needs to be listened to. The Council draws together those people from all sectors – from producers to users – and so enables the Department to be responsive to moods and opinions, and this is reflected in the Panel who actually allocate the grant."

Before finishing I had to raise the question of support for English-language leisure publishing in Wales. "I feel it will come with time," said Richard. "If you look at leisure publishing in countries of a similar nature to Wales, such as Ireland or Scotland, even though they have stronger literary and academic publishing industries, popular and leisure publications tend to be very much the product of an Anglo-American industry. If we wish to develop a truly Welsh 'brand' in publishing then I believe some public assistance will be needed – the spin-offs would be of both economic and cultural benefit to Wales."

DISCUSSING BOOKS ON THE WEB

You may remember that Janet Davies discussed the Books Council's new initiative of reviewing books on the Web in the last issue of *The Friend*. Since then, Janet and her co-editors have been busy commissioning reviews, and there are now over 500 of them on the www.gwales.com site. This means that we are well on our way to reaching our target of 1,000 reviews by the end of March 2003.

As well as reading the reviews, any reader is also free to add his or her own comments on the titles listed on gwales.com, and we believe that this will be an excellent way of promoting books from Wales. May we encourage you all to take advantage of this facility, and to add your comments by following the simple instructions.

The Books Council's Marketing Department have recently prepared the first e-letter which will be sent to anyone who wishes to receive it. This e-letter will include snippets about books, developments at the Books Council as well as the latest information about the book trade. If you would like to receive your copy of the e-letter please send us a note by e-mail – marketing@wbc.org.uk.

