

## The Mary Vaughan Jones Award



Elwyn Jones  
and Jac Jones

The Mary Vaughan Jones Award was established following the death of the author in 1983, to commemorate her substantial and unique contribution to the field of children's books in a period where very few children's titles were available. The award is presented once every three years by the Welsh Books Council to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to the field over many years.

The silver award presented to the recipient has been designed to reflect some of the best-known characters from Mary Vaughan Jones's books; it is commissioned from the jeweller Rhiannon, Tregaron, and financed with the aid of a contribution from the Friends of the Books Council.

This year's award was presented to the artist Jac Jones for the outstanding contribution he has made to children's books in Wales through his striking and attractive illustrations in over 200 books. Since 1976 he has cooperated with a host of authors, illustrating their work and adding a visual element to their books in his own inimitable way. Indeed, it is very apt that he won an award in memory of Mary Vaughan Jones, as he worked closely with the author to bring to life some of her best-known characters including, amongst others, the popular and endearing character Jac y Jwc. He was also responsible for creating

Mabon and Mabli, two characters used extensively over the years by Mudiad Meithrin in their books and magazines.

The award was presented to Jac at a special ceremony held at Oriol Ynys Môn in June this year. Professor Gwyn Thomas and Mairwen Prys Jones paid him heartfelt tributes, in the presence of many of Jac's friends and supporters of children's books. Jac was delighted to receive the award, and felt that it was both an honour and a crowning moment in a very successful career.

Since the Mary Vaughan Jones Award was presented for the first time in 1985, it has been won by Ifor Owen, Emily Huws, T. Llew Jones, W. J. Jones, Roger Boore, J. Selwyn Lloyd, Elfyn Pritchard, Mair Wynn Hughes and Angharad Tomos.



Professor Gwyn Thomas, Mairwen Prys Jones and Jac Jones

## From the Chair

Tegwyn Jones



'Let the leader be a bridge' says the ancient adage quoted in the story of Branwen in the Mabinogion, and I was minded of it on the Monday of this year's National Eisteddfod when Gwyneth Lewis – in response to the call of the Corn Gwlad – rose in the audience to claim her Crown for her series of free metre poems on the subject 'Ynys' ('Island'). She, as will be recalled, was the first to be appointed National Poet of Wales (2005–6), and her name will be familiar as the author of volumes of verse and factual prose. Gwyneth is also a rare example of a premier author who has succeeded in bridging and enriching the literature of both our languages. It is with pleasure, therefore, that we congratulate her on that happy August occasion in the Vale of Glamorgan, while at the same time thanking her for her contribution to the canon of Welsh literature. Not the least is the series of poems for which she was awarded the Crown this year – a series that will be avidly read and discussed by many literary groups during the coming winter, no doubt with pleasure and to their edification. As Friends we greet Gwyneth with our warmest best wishes. It would be an honour to welcome her to our midst!

# Brenda Chamberlain

2012 is the centenary of Brenda Chamberlain's birth and here we have an extract written by Damian Walford Davies, poet and Professor of English at Aberystwyth University, from the foreword to *The Water-castle* by Brenda Chamberlain, newly republished in the Library of Wales series by Parthian.

In a 1947 review of Gwyn Jones's collection of stories, *The Buttercup Field*, published in *The Dublin Magazine*, Brenda Chamberlain confessed the need she felt to get 'through the narrow archway of the enchanted castle that is Wales into the no less enchanted universe outside, of which the castle and its inhabitants are part'. Published in the year in which she left the hills above Llanllechid, Caernarfonshire, to establish a home on Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli), this expression of a desire to experience and respond imaginatively to a world beyond the local may seem more than a little ironic. What kind of spirit counsels escape from a moated castle only to choose an island – in the specific case of Bardsey, one often made inaccessible by a hazardous tide-race – as home? Chamberlain's friend Jonah Jones said that she arrived on Bardsey 'part-wounded in some way' after the breakdown of her marriage to the artist and engraver John Petts. Yet Chamberlain's poetry, prose and paintings, while acutely attuned to the shapes of her native landscape and culture (as her masterpiece of fabling autobiography, *Tide-race* (1962) proves), had always gestured beyond the protection – and incarceration – of the Welsh castle. The major published works of her final, fraught decade form part of a complex emotional geography of Europe, extending from Bardsey through post-war Germany and down to Greece and the Aegean, where she saw 'the Welsh sea' joining 'its fountain-head, the maternal middle ocean that hisses round promontories of pale-boned islands' (as she would write in *A Rope of Vines: Journal from a Greek Island* (1965), also available in the Library of Wales series).

It was in 1932 in her native Bangor that the twenty-year-old Chamberlain met Karl von Laer, a young student on a visit from Thuringia, the 'green heart' of Germany. From the moment she met von Laer, Chamberlain's work can be seen to chart lines of communication and response over dividing bodies of water, and across controlled fronts and borders. The Second World War, during which von Laer fought



for Germany on the Russian front, temporarily broke that communication, but in late 1952, Chamberlain, accompanied by her partner Jean van der Bijl, travelled to Westphalia in north-west Germany to meet von Laer again.

*The Water-castle* both verifies and contests Anthony Conran's remark that Chamberlain's work is an exercise in 'invent[ing] her own life'. An inveterate mapper of autobiography onto fiction, she 'steer[ed] her imagination between the real islands of a real outside', to the extent that her 'great act of fiction was herself'.

Chamberlain's aspiration to move beyond the confines of the Welsh cultural castle leads her to explore two actual

'castles' in her novel – one imaginatively, the other literally. The first is the moated baroque schloss of von Laer's ancestral estate at Schlotheim, Thuringia, 'lost' now in the Russian eastern zone of Germany – a romanticised space belonging to a class-bound European past. The second is the moated manor-farm (the Gut or 'water-castle' of the title) to which Karl von Laer fled as a refugee after the war, and where Chamberlain visited him in the dying days of 1952.

Begun in 1953 immediately after her return from Germany, *The Water-castle* is an eerie, ironic Cold War romance and a 'story of Europe', as a contemporary reviewer described it. Both intensely personal and profoundly public, the novel lays bare a woman's emotional hunger and creative energies in the context of the physical and emotional displacements of post-war Europe. Chamberlain emerges in this novel as a profoundly political writer, which gives the lie to the orthodox assessment of her work as untroubled by ideological debates. In this sense, *The Water-castle* is a work that can be located in a continuum alongside the distinguished play Chamberlain wrote in response to the Colonels' Coup in Greece in 1967, *The Protagonists* – the first ever published edition of which I have prepared this year. In the centenary of her birth, Chamberlain's posthumous literary profile has never been healthier.

'Ordinarily, I keep no sort of journal, but during those weeks on the little farm, at the water-castle, and in the Harz mountains, I recorded the events as they happened.'

## Wales Arts Review



[walesartsreview.org](http://walesartsreview.org) does exactly what its title suggests, but our ambition for the project is far wider than simply reviewing the arts in Wales. By calling the website *Wales Arts Review* we hope to evoke the boldness of publications like the *New York Review of Books*, the *London Review of Books* and the *Paris Review*. Each of those esteemed organs of print uses the connotation of a cosmopolitan metropolis to give a sense of being

near the centre of the literary world. But none of those publications are restricted solely to publishing writing from or about the titular city, or indeed only book reviews. On the contrary, each is dedicated primarily to the long-form essay and all are characterised by an international scope and reach.

*Wales Arts Review* is dedicated to similar goals. We want to make Wales known internationally for the highest standards of in-depth arts criticism. We want to support and develop new critical voices. And we want to bridge the gap between the great traditions of print and the exciting possibilities of digital. To this end, we are in the process of redesigning the site. From November,

*Wales Arts Review* will have a slick new look and a wealth of new features.

To mark the occasion, we have organised the first annual *Wales Arts Review* Critics' Roundtable. On Saturday, 17 November at 1pm, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama's Richard Burton Theatre will host some of Wales and the UK's leading writers, critics, theatre directors and media figures. Adrian Masters, Jon Gower, Niall Griffiths, Lyn Gardner, Linda Christmas, Jasper Rees and John E. McGrath are just some of the guests who will join the *Wales Arts Review* team to discuss the relationships between politics and the theatre, 'high' art and popular culture, and alcohol and the Celts.

# Retirement

## Delyth Humphreys



Delyth Humphreys

At the end of September 2012, Delyth Humphreys, one of the most familiar faces on the staff of the Welsh Books Council, retired.

Delyth, who has been Head of the Children's Books and Reading Promotion Department since July 2011, was appointed to the Council in 1997, originally as Sbondonics officer, and then as World Book Day promoter.

Delyth had strong links with the field of children's literature long before she joined the Books Council; she is a librarian by profession, and spent a substantial part of her career as a librarian in secondary schools.

"When a job comes to an end," said Delyth, "it's time to clear the decks. Whilst doing that over the summer, I was reminded of some of the enjoyable things that have happened over the past fifteen years. Shortly after I joined the Council staff, the Sbri-di-ri book club was launched in the presence of thousands of children. Seven members of the department's staff travelled around schools in Wales over a period of four days, in the company of several well-known characters from children's books (aka brave volunteers in bulky costumes!) and a car boot full of balloons. With the characters being mobbed at every venue, and the balloons escaping regularly from the boot, the visits were quite an experience, to say the least! The highlight of the celebrations was seeing Sali Mali landing on Ffriddoedd Fields, Bangor, having been flown in a Manweb helicopter. It was certainly a week to remember!

"A legendary voyage to Ireland was arranged to celebrate World Book Day 2001, when hundreds of children from Anglesey, together with children's authors and illustrators, travelled on the ferry from Holyhead to Dublin. It was, apparently, a memorable voyage for several reasons – but, luckily, I had volunteered to stay behind in the office on that particular day! I have

fond memories too of Sali Mali's 30th birthday during the Urdd Eisteddfod in Lampeter; we had to inflate hundreds of balloons to distribute amongst the children, but had no hope of keeping up with the huge demand! It is strange to think of all the hours of work involved with the preparations for the Urdd eisteddfodau at one time – half the department's staff would be on all fours in the exhibition room attaching Velcro to 8' x 6' display boards, using up endless cans of spray mount, before wrapping all the boards – as many as eight or ten of them – in bubble wrap, ready to be transported to the Eisteddfod field!

"The past fifteen years have been an interesting period, full of opportunities, and I am greatly indebted to the Books Council for giving me such a wealth of wonderful experiences. People ask me how I intend to spend my time from now on. Well, in the short term, I hope to become a millionaire by using eBay to sell all the treasures I'm sure to find in the attic! Having got that out of my system, my hope is to enjoy good health so that I can spend time with the family and do some charity work – and read, of course!"

We wish Delyth all the best in the future, and thank her warmly for all the wonderful work she has achieved during her period as a member of the Council staff.

## Celebrating 50 years of the Welsh Books Council

As part of the Council's 50th anniversary celebrations, it was decided to arrange a staff reunion during the summer. Looking back through staff lists, it became evident that there were over 150 people who had worked for the Council at different times – some for short periods and others for many years – who could be invited. Contact was made with most of them, and over 100 people (including the majority of the current staff) were present at the reunion on Thursday, 21 June. Although it was the longest day of the year as well as being the summer solstice, the heavens opened and the Council's decision to erect a marquee in front of Castell Brychan for the occasion was a wise one!

Short speeches were given by four people: Elwyn Jones, the current Chief Executive, welcomed everyone to the event; then the Rev. Enid Morgan entertained us with her reminiscences as the first (part-time) member of staff, who worked at the Cardiganshire Library building at the time, long before the Books Council had its own premises. She was followed by Gwerfyl Pierce Jones, a member of staff from 1976 to 2009 and Director for the period 1987–2009, and by Dafydd Charles Jones, Manager of the Distribution Centre at Glanrafon from 1989 to 2010.

An extensive buffet had been prepared, and over the



Reminiscing at Castell Brychan

delicious food the marquee was filled with the sounds of lively chatting and reminiscing. Some had travelled long distances to be present, and everyone enjoyed the opportunity to meet up with old friends who, in some cases, they had not seen for many years. A large screen had been set up in the reception area to show photographs of several members of staff over many years – an interesting

experience, though frightening too as some of us realised how much we had changed over the years!

It was a most pleasant and entertaining afternoon, and warm thanks are due to all those who worked so hard to make the arrangements. The occasion will linger long in the memories of current and past members of Council staff.

# E-Books

## Phil Davies – Director of Information and Promotion

This year is a significant one for the publishing industry in Wales as gwales.com, the Council's books website, starts selling e-books in addition to print titles. As *The Friend* goes to press there are over 300 titles of Welsh interest available as e-books on the website, with 65 of them in the Welsh language.

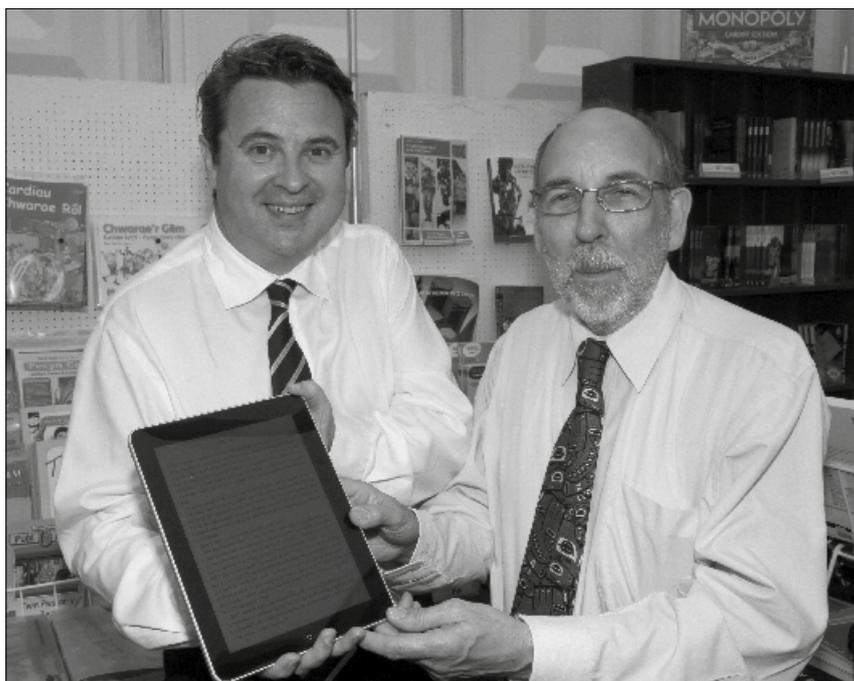
The website, established in 1999 with the support of the Welsh Government, is a comprehensive source of books and reading material from Wales in both languages.

Since its inception, the website has been developed to serve booksellers and libraries in addition to members of the public, and its success is due to the fact that customers from all corners of the world are able to use it to find information and to order books. A high percentage of the orders received come from outside Wales.

Thanks to further support from the Welsh Government, the website is now able to promote e-books in addition to print titles, which is a leap forward in the process of offering readers a wide choice of material. The Welsh Government's Language Strategy also notes e-books as an important field to develop for the benefit of the Welsh language. Currently, more and more people enjoy reading books on electronic devices, thereby increasing the demand for reading material from Wales in both languages – a demand which we have a responsibility to meet.

Ateb was the company responsible for the technical work involved in adapting the website, and we also took the opportunity to introduce more secure payment methods, including the ability to pay through the PayPal system. The Language Technologies Unit, Canolfan Bedwyr, Bangor University, was commissioned to prepare a background report on e-books, in addition to a document of technical guidelines for the publishers, produced in cooperation with the the Design Department. The Grants Department also offers a financial incentive to publishers to encourage them to produce electronic versions of their main Welsh-language titles, and a target of 100 Welsh e-books was set for the first year of the scheme.

The Council took the decision of selling e-books in EPUB format, mainly so that they could be downloaded onto a variety of reading devices, rather than confining the choice to only one format. Amongst the devices able to read e-books



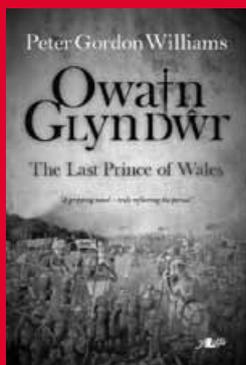
Huw Lewis and Phil Davies

in this format are the Sony Reader, Kobo, Nook, every PC and notepad that uses Adobe Digital Editions, Android phones and all iPads and iPhones (by downloading a Bluefire Reader). At the same time, we are encouraging the publishers to come to an arrangement with Amazon so that the books can also be made available on the Kindle device. We are of the opinion that it would be unwise to place all our eggs in the Amazon basket, especially in light of the rapid progress of developments in the field.

As we were not in a position to finance our own independent system, we developed a relationship with Gardners, the largest book wholesalers in Britain. This allows the Council to offer e-books in various forms – EPUB, PDF or MP3 – to Gwales customers, and also allows booksellers who have their own websites to offer exactly the same books to their customers.

Another advantage of the relationship with Gardners is the fact that Askews, one of Gardners' sister companies, also supplies books to the Welsh libraries consortium. It can be seen, therefore, that the whole industry, as well as the ordinary reader, is able to benefit from this exciting development.

Huw Lewis AM, the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, visited the Books Council's unit at the Vale of Glamorgan National Eisteddfod this year, and in welcoming the e-books development he said: "I am very pleased that the Welsh Government has provided additional funding of £36,000 to enable the Welsh Books Council to facilitate the sale of e-books on the gwales.com website. It is encouraging to know that readers can now order Welsh and English books from the website, and I am glad that the development will also help booksellers, libraries and the general public."



Welsh E-Books