



The South Wales Record Society

Registered charity no 700285

Newsletter No.1

April 2012

This is the first newsletter the South Wales Record Society has produced and its aim is to provide more information and create a greater feeling of cohesion amongst members – some of whom live in places as far away as Canada and Japan. Without your support this society would flounder and we appreciate your continuing interest which allows original source materials that would otherwise only be accessible in archives and libraries, to be examined by a wider readership. As you are aware, each text is provided with a scholarly introduction, notes, bibliography, and other glossaries and appendices which enable the original source to be placed in its historical context. Thus, by publishing we bring documents into the public domain and in this task we work closely with academics, archivists, librarians and local historians in south Wales.

A word from our President (Dr. Maddy Gray)

A Record Society sounds like a very nineteenth-century antiquarian body, but in the last few years the South Wales Record Society has become a thoroughly third-millennium organization. We have a web site and can receive orders for our publications from all over the world. We are now considering moving into online publication, either pay-to-download or open access, for some texts which we do not think will be

suitable for publication in book form. It has been a great privilege to serve on the Society's committee and to be its President in these exciting times.

Editing the volumes

Since the society was established in 1982 there have been 4 general editors and 24 volumes have been published. Professor Chris Williams is in the process of editing his last volume and Professor Ray Howell has already taken over and has new volumes in the process of being edited. We are fortunate to have had the expertise and knowledge of two such well known academics from south Wales. For the first time our society will be publishing a book in Welsh with a translation in English.

Professor Ray Howell (our new general editor) discusses some future publications

Christabel Hutchings describes her experience of editing the next volume: *The Correspondence of Thomas Henry Thomas (Arlunydd Penygarn, 1839-1915)*.

It has taken me ten years to research the correspondence of T. H. Thomas who was an artist, naturalist and cultural nationalist. My father referred to him as 'Uncle', although he was a distant cousin, and described him as 'an important man'. I was sceptical until I read Peter Lord's book, *The Visual Culture of Wales*, and realised that my father had a point. I visited the library at St Fagan's National History Museum which I assumed held all his correspondence. I was wrong. In time I discovered letters in The National Library of Wales, Cardiff Central Library, Cardiff University and numerous departments of the National Museum. I identified over 874 items of correspondence which dealt with his many interests and included information about his neglected role in the promotion of the red dragon as the national

emblem for Wales. The NLW's new useful 'aqua browser' came online last year and allows easier access to all the library's collections. It reveals that there are many letters from Thomas in other people's manuscript collections, but I have only included manuscripts that emanated from Thomas's personally preserved collection. One had to draw a line somewhere.

Reading documents can be difficult and handwriting is sometimes difficult and even impossible to decipher. There were also letters in Welsh and French and I am indebted to friends and former colleagues for their help with translation. When I began my research, institutions would not allow the use of a digital camera and so I laboriously abstracted information in long hand. The use of a camera is now generally accepted and has made research so much easier. Documents can be enlarged which aids reading and those not suitable for photocopying can be easily recorded.

There are 431 correspondents in Thomas's manuscript collections and only 6 remain unidentified. Without the NLW'S Biography Online, Archives Wales and the National Biography Online, it would have been an impossible task and without internet access it might have taken thirty years not ten. However, I became fascinated by many of these correspondent's remarkable lives and they became old friends. In fact I began to feel that Thomas's world was more real than my own. It has been an amazing journey and I have met so my helpful and interesting people along the way. I would not have missed this experience for the world.

Rosemary Davies assesses the Society's need to respond to modern technology

We either love it or we hate it – modern technology, I mean and email in particular! Joking aside,

email seems to be the way forward for the society to communicate with its members especially with the ever-increasing cost of postage. I fully appreciate that not everyone has a computer in the house or, indeed, ready access to the Internet but we are appealing to members who do to let us have their email addresses to add to our membership database. I would hope that members embrace this idea as it would make communication more immediate than conventional mailing and will also mean that AGM papers and book launch notices can be sent out more cheaply (and quickly) leaving more of our funds to put into making more texts available.

As volumes become out of print they lend themselves to digitisation to keep the information contained in them in the public domain. Through *Welsh Journals Online* the National Library of Wales has already made three out-of-print titles available; these are:

The Diaries of John Bird edited by Hilary Thomas

Bradney's History of Monmouthshire, Volume V, edited by Dr. Madeleine Gray

The Glamorgan Hearth Tax Assessment of 1670, edited by Elizabeth Parkinson.

The intention is to publish online ourselves in the future via our own website.

Various other ideas are under discussion such as placing past Cardiff University Local History Diploma students dissertations on the website as well as small MS with commentary where full-scale publishing would not be cost-effective.

Perhaps members have documents in their possession or know of documents that might be suitable for inclusion.

We would be very interested in your views - by email, of course!

Contact us at
southwalesrecordsociety@yahoo.co.uk

The Website

The website site has considerably helped us increase sales and we are grateful to Andrew Dulley of West Glamorgan Archives for designing and updating the website. I think you will agree that it is attractive and informative. It also has an email address through which the wider public can contact us. You might be interested to know that a researcher from a north Wales TV company recently contacted our society as they were interested in the *Swansea Wartime Diary of Laurie Latchford* for a programme they are producing on the Second World War. Also many people contact us and ask questions and receive help from Rosemary our secretary who is of course also an archivist. For past and future volumes see the website:

www.southwalesrecordsociety.co.uk

Sales

Selling books is not so easy in the present economic climate. Individual members and organisations do not have the resources to buy all our books and we recognise that many people and institutions have to choose those publications that are of particular interest to them. This leaves us with a problem as published books do not always pay their way. In the early days 700 items were published, but this would never be possible today. We now aim to publish at least 200 depending on our assessment of the book's likely sales. Postage and packing costs add to our problems. Also some of the early maps cost a great deal to post because of their need for special packaging. It has therefore been

decided to price the postage and packing of each volume separately in future.

Due to increasing costs there will be an increase in the membership fee from £3.00 to £5.00 subject to AGM approval.

Also would members let us know about book fairs, lectures, conferences or open days through which we can maximise sales.

You can contact Christabel on

christabelhutchings@yahoo.co.uk

Obviously we have a quantity of unsold stock but I am pleased to be able to inform you that Kim Collis of West Glamorgan Archives has agreed to store some of the stock while Gary Tuson of Gwent Archives (recently relocated at Ebbw Vale) has agreed to store the remainder. We are most grateful to them both. West Glamorgan Archives has been open in its present suite of rooms since 2008, and now Glamorgan Archives and Gwent Archives have moved to new premises. What was often a dark or subterranean experience has turned into a pleasurable day out and we advise you to make visits to these three institutions which incidentally also have their own informative websites.



[Tony Hopkins, deputy archivist at Gwent Archives gives visitors a guided tour of the magnificent former General Offices of Ebbw Vale Steelworks where Gwent Archives is now located]

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Book Reviews

Marilynn Osment on the Latchford Diary writes: I received a copy of this publication from yourselves recently and I would like to record my thanks to all concerned with its publication.....what a fascinating account of this man's experiences during the difficult early days of the war in Swansea. Perhaps you would convey my comments to the editors, Kate Elliot Jones and Wendy Cope - this book is an important addition to my ever growing collection of books on the history of Swansea!

French History, 2011 carried a very complimentary review on Ralph Griffiths volume '*In Conversation with Napoleon Bonaparte*' J H Vivian's Visit to the Island of Elba which concludes

'Thanks to Ralph Griffiths, who has supplied a useful introduction and a good deal of annotation, not to mention numerous illustrations, this rare and valuable document has

become more widely available. Before long we shall be reminded of Britain's role in the final stages of the Napoleonic drama. However, the fatal attraction that the fallen Emperor continued to exert, even over former enemies, has all too rarely been acknowledged and we should be grateful for the poignant testimony offered by this brief memoir.