

AP GWYNN, ARTHUR (1902-1987), librarian and the third librarian of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth

Name: Arthur ap Gwynn
Date of birth: 1902
Date of death: 1987
Gender: Male
Occupation: librarian and the third librarian of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth
Area of activity: Education; Literature and Writing; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Alun Eirug Davies

Arthur ap Gwynn, born 4 November 1902, was the second of the three children of **Thomas Gwynn Jones**, the distinguished poet, and Margaret Jane Jones; Eluned was the eldest and Llywelyn the youngest. Arthur ap Gwynn was born in Caernarfon when his father was working on the papers, *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, *Papur Pawb* and the *Carnarvon & Denbigh Herald*. The family moved to Denbigh in 1906, Mold in 1907 and returned to Caernarfon in 1908, before moving to Aberystwyth in 1909. Apart from a period in Cardiff between 1926 and 1932 and a shorter period in Swansea between 1942 and 1945, Arthur ap Gwynn spent most of his life in Aberystwyth and its neighbourhood. In 1945 he returned to live in Waun-fawr, Aberystwyth and after retiring in 1967 he moved with his wife to the village of Eglwys-fach, Ceredigion, where he lived until his death.

He was educated in Ardwyn County School Aberystwyth, and the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, where he graduated with first class Honours in Welsh in 1923. His thesis, 'A comparison of the Welsh version of Amlyn ac Amic with the French and Latin versions, with a study of the grammatical forms and syntax of the Welsh version' won him his M.A. (Wales) in 1926. After graduating in 1923 he held a post in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, until 1925. He was head of the Welsh department in the Cardiff Free Library between 1926 and 1932 before returning to Aberystwyth as Librarian of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, a post he held between October 1932 and February 1942, when he left to join the fire service in Swansea, and from June 1945 to October 1967, a period of over 31 years.

'A story of small beginnings and a slow growth and a somewhat uncertain future.' That is how Arthur ap Gwynn himself described his period as librarian of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, between 1932 and 1967. His predecessor, J. D. Williams concluded his account of the College Library in *The College by the Sea* (edited by Iwan Morgan, 1928) with references to the Library growing to 'its present dimensions of about 50,000 volumes, exclusive of class or seminar libraries,' to the moving of mathematics and physics books into the Science Library (later the Modern Language Library); by such removals from the main Library 'additional accommodation has been secured from time to time, but this piece-meal procedure cannot be carried on indefinitely.' It remained the policy, however. Chemistry had in fact left the main buildings in 1907. The Science Library, in addition to Mathematics and Physics, contained most of the College's books in other sciences, and as the departments grew and their books took more and more room in the Science Library, they were forced out. Between 1928 and 1932 (the year in which Arthur ap Gwynn was appointed), the Agriculture, Botany, Geology, Geography, and Zoology departments were set up in outside premises, their books with them. This went on also in the General Library, from which the Economics Department first broke away, followed after a long interval by the Education Department, and, the Law and German departments in 1936 and, last of all, the Classics departments.

In the 1950s however the number of departmental libraries actually decreased in consequence of the fusion of libraries of related departments. In 1954 the Geography - Geology joint Library was formed. In 1959 the Biology Library uniting the former Botany and Zoology libraries. The fusion of the libraries of related departments continued in the 1960s. In 1962 the Physical Sciences Library moved into its new quarters on the upper floor of the Physical Sciences Building on Penglais. It absorbed a third department, becoming the Mathematics, Physics, Statistics Library. The Economics, International Politics, Political Science, Law, Geography and Geology library opened in September 1965 in the new Llandinam Library. Owing to a number of collections moving into the Llandinam Library, the German language and literature collections, of which rather more than half were previously in the Modern Languages Library, were moved into the room left empty by the transfer of the Law Library. The Russian collection was also moved into the same room in No. 11, Marine Terrace. The Education Departmental Library was moved to Alexandra Road, the former Geography - Geology Library.

Other departmental libraries at the time of Arthur ap Gwynn's retirement included the Rural Sciences Institute Library, covering Agricultural and the closely-related but physically separated Dairy Buildings; the Chemistry Library; the Music Library which had a considerable amount of autonomy; the Agricultural Economics Library was completely autonomous. The Library of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station was also completely autonomous, although it also worked in parallel with the College Library, notifying its books and periodicals additions.

By 1962 the Library had 154,000 volumes on its shelves: the General Library (including the Classics Library totalled about 75,000 volumes) the Departmental Libraries (including the Science Library) about 72,000 volumes; other collections and seminars 7,000 volumes. There were 300 places for readers in the General Library and Classics Libraries and 365 places in the departmental libraries. By 1967 the Library had over 200,000 volumes on the shelves.

Provision of funds for staff salaries, books and periodicals, was always considered to be inadequate throughout the period. J.D. Williams had seen 'the Library growing to its present proportions with a staff of four instead of one' in 1928. The presence in the College of 500 University College, London, students in the General Library in 1940 caused accommodation and staffing problems. Trestle tables and 120 chairs were borrowed from the Parish Hall as temporary measures and in response to a request for additional staff, University College, London, agreed to transfer two members of their Library staff to the College. In February 1942 Arthur ap Gwynn left his post as Librarian for National Service in Swansea. He resumed his duties on 1 June 1945, having been absent for a period of three years and four months. Mrs E. C. Gwynn, the wife of his brother Llywelyn, was appointed acting Librarian during his absence. The number of staff, thus depleted during the war by one (the Librarian himself, the only male on the staff), was still four in 1945. But student numbers (which was as low as 600 before 1939) again soared, to a maximum for the immediate post war years, of about 1,240. Again the increase in the student body forced the authorities to increase both staffing and funds. Increases in staffing were fairly steady, though the setting up of a cataloguing section as a separate entity caused a sudden bulge in 1958. A Photographic Department was opened in 1965. In 1962 a total of nineteen and by the time Arthur ap Gwynn's successor, **Dr. H. D. Emanuel**, took over there were almost forty members of staff.

Increases in book and periodical funding were spasmodic, a lean year (or years) often following a kinder one. The custom of providing a newly-appointed head of department with a special grant to enable him to fill gaps in the collections on his subject was set up between 1932 and 1939; and there were some few other special grants given. In general, however, departmental grants were considered to be seriously inadequate even for the purchase of books alone, since they had to bear the cost of periodicals and binding also. In 1937 the Library Committee agreed to set up a periodicals fund and a binding fund, to be controlled by itself; money for these was provided by withdrawing from the departmental grants the sum previously charged against them for those two purposes. Even in 1962 when the total library grant was at least four times that it was in 1947, the librarian was conscious of the need to exercise economy in the matter of periodicals and binding, and most of the departments found it necessary to limit their choice of books so as to keep expenditure within bounds.

By the sixties University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, was fast becoming 'the College on the Hill' rather than 'the College by the Sea.' The Old College building, including the General Library, was no longer the chief focus of academic activity. Year by year overcrowding in the General Library got worse. The recommendations of the Robbins Committee's *Report on Higher Education* published in 1963 were adopted immediately by the government and the process of change accelerated. Student numbers topped 2000 in 1965. The first tentative steps towards a new unified library were taken in 1964 when a working party to consider the planning of a future main library 'on the Hill' was set up. Arthur ap Gwynn retired in 1967, the year which saw the publication of the University Grants Committee *Report of the Committee on Libraries* chaired by the College Principal, **Dr. Thomas Parry**. The Librarian's last words to the Governors in September 1967 were: 'Given propitious circumstances, including universal acceptance of the urgency of the case, it is hoped that the middle years of the quinquennium may yet see the foundation of a new library laid.' Arthur ap Gwynn lived to see the opening of the Hugh Owen Library 1 September 1976. Shortly before he died he endowed the Hugh Owen Library with a fund for the purchase of books on archaeology in memory of his wife and his son, Rhys, who had died in 1943.

Arthur ap Gwynn also contributed to the bibliography of Wales. In *Llyfrgelloedd yng Nghymru - proceedings*, 1933 (pp. 43-7), he published his 'Modern Welsh books from point of view of Reader and Librarian'. In the same year appeared the first volume of an important bibliographical publication under his editorship, namely *Subject Index to Welsh Periodicals, Vol. 1, 1931* (Wales and Monmouthshire Branch of the Library Association). The second volume for 1932-33 appeared in 1936, the third volume for 1933-35 in 1937 and the fourth volume for 1936-37, in 1938, all edited by Arthur ap Gwynn and Idwal Lewis of the National Library of Wales. In 1952 when the fifth volume appeared for the years 1938-40, Idwal Lewis's name only appears as editor although Arthur ap Gwynn is acknowledged in the preface. It is obvious that his connection with the publication had ceased and from this time onwards the work of compiling and editing was being done entirely in the National Library of Wales. Arthur ap Gwynn also

published a tribute to William Williams, F.L.A. (1888-1950), Keeper of Printed Books in the National Library of Wales, in *Llyfrgelloedd yng Nghymru - proceedings 1950* and an article in *Barn* (Medi 1969), 'Nawddogi Awduron', on the Public Lending Right issue.

From 1949 onwards Arthur ap Gwynn either assisted his father, reprinted his works or wrote about his life and works or assembled references for the forthcoming bibliography of **Thomas Gwynn Jones**. His first notes on his father appeared in *Y Llenor* 28 (1949) pp. 54-5, 'Manylion ynglyn â'i Fywyd a'i Waith', which he rewrote in 1982 for inclusion as 'Thomas Gwynn Jones: Dyddiau a Gweithiau,' in *Thomas Gwynn Jones*, edited by Gwynn ap Gwilym (Llandybie: Gwasg Christopher Davies), the third volume in the series *Cyfres y Meistri*, pp. 41-60. Reprinted in the same volume are 'T. Gwynn Jones' (*Yr Efrwydydd*, 1 (1950)), 'Thomas Gwynn Jones a David de Lloyd,' (*Y Traethodydd*, Ionawr 1971), 'I Aberystwyth Draw' (*Taliesin*, 24 (1972)). In 1950 he published jointly with his father his *Geiriadur Cymraeg a Saesneg - Cymraeg* (Caerdydd: Hughes a'i Fab a'r Educational Publishing Company), a revised edition of which appeared in 1953. In *Taliesin*, 16 (Nadolig, 1969, pp. 120-5, in his article on 'Thomas Gwynn Jones,' he corrected and added new facts. *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig 1941-1950* (1970) has a contribution by Arthur ap Gwynn and his brother in law, **Francis Wynn Jones** on **Thomas Gwynn Jones**. The English version appeared in 2001 in *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography 1941-1970*. In 1972 Arthur ap Gwynn was responsible for reprinting *Y Dwymyn 1934-35*, a reprint with preface by Arthur ap Gwynn (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru).

He contributed over 140 critical and literary references to *Llyfryddiaeth Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg* edited by **Thomas Parry** and Merfyn Morgan (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1976.) In 1976 he published his reprint of his father's *Welsh Folklore and Folk-custom* (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer), adding a preface and bibliographical notes containing details of the work done on Welsh folklore since the book appeared in 1930. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than the publication of the *Cofiant* to his father in 1973 by **David Jenkins** and the bibliography *Llyfryddiaeth Thomas Gwynn Jones* edited by D. Hywel Roberts in 1981. He had contributed 550 items to the latter.

Tall and erect in bearing, determined in step with a slight shadow of a smile over his moustache, he was a man of strong character with strong convictions concerning the spoken and written language in particular. His interests were many and varied, classical music and travel in France especially. He married Catherine Eluned Isaac in 1933. She was a former student of Welsh in the University at Cardiff. They had three children, Nonn, Rhys, who died when he was four years old in 1943 in Swansea, and Ceredig. She died in April 1975. Arthur ap Gwynn died in Bronlais Hospital, Aberystwyth, 10 December 1987, at the age of 85. On the day of his funeral, 16 December, a commemorative service was held in the College chapel. The Rev. D. R. Thomas delivered a prayer and read from the Scriptures while a tribute was given by **Professor Emeritus J. E. Caerwyn Williams**. **T. Gwynn Jones**'s hymn 'Gosber' was sung to the tune Ombersley. His ashes were scattered in mid-Wales.

Arthur ap Gwynn's papers have been deposited in the Hugh Owen Library, Aberystwyth University, 'Papurau Thomas Gwynn Jones ac Arthur ap Gwynn.'

Author

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Sources

Personal knowledge

Yr Angor, January 1988

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Arthur ap Gwynn](#)

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