KEEPER OF SECRETS

It is often the case that the most revealing secrets of great men and women are kept by their secretaries. This is after all the original meaning of ‘secretary’ — keeper of secrets. Secretaries who keep personal diaries are of particular interest to historians and one of the most assiduous of these was Albert James Sylvester who died in 1989, a month before his hundredth birthday.

A J Sylvester was Principal Private Secretary to Lloyd George from 1923 until LG’s death in 1945. He kept a diary in shorthand for much of this period and his observations on Lloyd George’s political and personal life were faithfully recorded. It is these diaries, deciphered and transcribed by Sylvester himself, which form the basis of the A J Sylvester Papers purchased by the National Library earlier this year.

Of Staffordshire peasant stock, A J Sylvester had none of the privileges associated with promotion in the Civil Service yet he became a trusted member of Lord Hankey’s secretariat during the Great War and subsequently he was appointed private secretary to three Prime Ministers, Lloyd George, Andrew Bonar Law and Stanley Baldwin. His talent was his fluent and speedy shorthand (in 1915 he was the first shorthand writer ever to take a note of a cabinet committee) and rapid typewriting.

In 1923, when Sylvester left the Civil Service to work for Lloyd George, he insisted on the title Principal Private Secretary to ensure that he would not be subservient to Frances Stevenson, Lloyd George’s private secretary and mistress. Sylvester had charge of Lloyd George’s private office in London which had a staff of over twenty researchers, typists and messengers but spent much of his time accompanying Lloyd George to meetings. As such, Sylvester was a witness to Lloyd George’s increasing political frustration during the 1920s and 1930s as his efforts to return to power proved fruitless.

Sylvester’s diaries were edited and published in part by Colin Cross in 1975 but much unpublished material remains unseen by historians. The papers also include files of correspondence many of which shed light on Lloyd George and his contemporaries.

There is also a large collection of photographs and cine-films taken by Sylvester. Among the latter is the unique film of Lloyd George’s visit to see Hitler at Berchtesgaden in September 1936.
The Advisory Committee
The twelfth meeting of the Welsh Political Archive’s Advisory Committee was held on 2 November 1990.

The Chairman (the Librarian, Dr Brynley F Roberts) reported that Miss Lowri Jones had been appointed Research Assistant to the Archive.

It was reported that the papers of Lord Cledwyn, Lord Elwyn-Jones and Leo Abse had been received.

It was resolved to invite Miss Beata Brookes, at present Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party in Wales, to become a member of the Committee.

The present members of the Committee are:
The Librarian, Dr Brynley F Roberts (Chairman)
Dr Denis Balson, UCW, Aberystwyth
Professor Deidre Beddoe, The Polytechnic of Wales
Miss Beata Brookes, Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party in Wales
Mr John Clement, formerly Under-Secretary at the Welsh Office
Mr Emrys Daniel, Director of Projects ITV
Mr Andrew Davies, Assistant Organiser, Labour Party Wales
Mr Tom Ellis
Mr Gwyn Griffiths, Chairman Welsh Liberal Democrats
Lord Hooson
Dr Deian Hopkin, UCW, Aberystwyth
Mr D Elwyn Jones, Conservative Party agent
Professor Kenneth O Morgan, Principal, UCW, Aberystwyth
Mr Gareth Price, Director of the Thomson International Foundation
Mr T M Haydn Rees, formerly Chief Executive Chwylw County Council
Mr Ted Rowlands, Member of Parliament
Dr Terry Thomas, SDP Development Officer
Mr Dafydd Wigley, Member of Parliament
Professor Gwilym A Williams
and from the National Library’s staff: Mr Daniel Hughes, Mr Gwyn Jenkins, Mrs Beli Jones, Mr J Graham Jones and Miss Lowri Jones.


Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg
(The Archive has received papers relating to the activities of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg in Ceredigion).

Election Study, 1979
In 1979 an important election study was conducted in Wales by the International Politics Department of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. The interview schedules for this study, together with the final report, have now been donated to the Archive. They provide important data on the state of Welsh public opinion at that time.

Also donated by the Department are papers relating to the Welsh Council, 1968–72.

DARLITHIAU’R ARCHIF WLEIDYDDOLO GYMREIG
Y ddarllith ddiweddaraf, i’w chyhoeddi ym Ebrill, bydd be published in April
Yr Arglwydd Cledwyn o Benrhos

Cymer y Diweddau Dwy / Wales in Both Houses
Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos
£2: 25

Darlithiau eraill y gyfraith
Other lectures in the series
1. John Grigg, Lloyd George and Wales (1987) £1: 50
3. David Marquand, History Revised? The Route to 1979 (1969) £1: 75

Post: Ychwanegwr 50c am un ddarllith, 75c am ddwy, e £1 am dair neu’r bedair
Add 50p for one lecture, 75p for two
and, £1 for three or all four

WELSH POLITICAL ARCHIVE LECTURES

Cyhoeddiadau eraill
Other publications
Rhymney Memories, Thomas Jones £4: 95
Cariad et al Guiud: a discourse on the love of our country (Richard Price 1789). Cyfieithiad yr Gymraeg ywchyd a ffacsimil mawr / Translated into Welsh with a facsimile of the original.
P A L Jones (gol. / ed.), £4: 25

Post: Ychwanegwr £1-00 am un gyfrol, £1-50 am ddwy
Add £1: 00 for one volume, £1-50 for both
Mrs Beti Jones, a member of the Archive’s Advisory Committee, has recently completed work on a project called Newsplan which aims at the preservation of United Kingdom local newspapers with the British Library, local libraries and other national libraries working in co-operation. Here she looks at some interesting political newspapers of the last century.

‘Newspapers are an invaluable and heavily used resource for research of all kinds, but by their very nature they are not intended to last indefinitely, and the effects of chemical changes and wear and tear on their files present libraries with a preservation problem on a large scale.

I should like to refer briefly here to one aspect of some of the early newspapers that I have encountered on Newsplan work.

A characteristic of Welsh newspapers of the 19th century in particular is the gusto with which they attack their opponents — political, religious or otherwise — and the seeming boundlessness of their personal abuse. One paper famed for its invective was The Figaro in Wales, published in Bangor between 1835 and 1836. Its main targets were the influential people of Bangor and Caernarfon, including a clique of local Tories who sought to reach powerful positions in the two boroughs. One target was James Hews Bransby, editor of the Carnarvon Herald who was branded ‘Tory Spy’, ‘Judas Silkworm’ and ‘Penchos bone-polisher’. As a result of attacks in the Figaro Bransby resigned the editorship of the Herald. The Figaro also succeeded in reducing the Caernarfon Tories to a minority on the Town Council.

It is known that the earlier 19th century newspapers such as The Figaro, were carefully watched by paid agents of the Home Office, aided by local magistrates who would send regular reports to London. Obvious targets among Welsh newspapers were those which espoused the Chartist cause, such as The Cardiff Reporter, Udger’s Cymru and the Advocate, but each managed to escape with a warning having been reported for endangering the security of the realm. The Welshman was charged with libel by the Tory magistrates of Carmarthen and Pembroke no less than five times between 1833 and 1839. In the south-east, the Whig-Tory battle raged between the Monmouthshire Merlin (1832), and the Merthyr Guardian, founded to oppose the ‘insidious poison’ of Nonconformist doctrine of the former.
Plaid Cymru

(Additions to the Plaid Cymru Archives include minutes and papers relating to the Swansea branch and to the Ceredigion constituency committee).

Lord Edmund-Davies Papers
The Library has been fortunate to receive a large group of the papers of Baron Edmund-Davies of Aberpennar, reflecting his distinguished career as a barrister, High Court judge and Lord of Appeal in Ordinary. There are papers concerning the trial of the ‘great train robbers’ in 1964, and records deriving from his chairmanship of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Aberfan Disaster, 1966–7, together with extensive files of correspondence, speech notes and legal papers.

Welsh Communist
Through the kindness of Mrs Dora Cox, the Archive has received the papers of her late husband Mr Idris Cox (1899–1989), south Wales miner, Communist activist and propagandist.

Among the papers is an unpublished autobiography which documents Idris Cox’s work as a full-time Communist Party organiser, mainly in Wales, and editor of the Daily Worker. A photocopy of a later and more complete version of this autobiography has since been received though the good offices of Dr Hywel Francis of the University College of Swansea.

The papers also include communist pamphlets, correspondence and lectures, much of which reflect Idris Cox’s communist beliefs and growing interest in nationalism, international affairs and Welsh working class history.

Olwen Carey-Evans with her mother Dame Margaret
Lloyd George at No. 10 Downing Street, 1917

Lady Olwen Carey-Evans Papers
Following the recent death of Lady Olwen Carey-Evans (1892–1990), the last of the five children of David and Margaret Lloyd George, the Archive has been able to acquire a group of family papers of considerable political and personal interest which complement other archives held at the library. There are some fifty letters, 1894–1942, from Lloyd George to members of his family, many commenting on political life, letters to Lloyd George, 1890–1942, from correspondents including A J Balfour, Winston Churchill, Edward, Prince of Wales, Andrew Bonar Law and Sir Herbert Samuel, together with many speech notes and memorabilia. There are small groups of papers of Dame Margaret Lloyd George, Lady Megan Lloyd-George, Lady Olwen and her husband Sir Thomas Carey-Evans, and other members of the family.

A large number of photographs and family portraits have been transferred to the Department of Pictures and Maps, and records of Lloyd George’s speeches, tapes and films to the library’s Audio-Visual Unit.