The seventeenth annual lecture of the Welsh Political Archive attracted probably the largest audience to date. Some 300 individuals packed into the Examination Hall at the Old College, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, on Friday, 7 November 2003 at 5.30 pm. The reason is not far to seek, for the lecturer was Mr Ron Davies, the Labour Secretary of State for Wales, 1997-98, one of the foremost architects of the National Assembly for Wales and the first person to hold the position of the Assembly’s First Minister.

A native of Machen in Gwent, educated at Bassaleg, Portsmouth and Cardiff, Ron Davies became a schoolteacher, and later a tutor/organiser for the WEA and further education adviser while also winning his spurs as an aspiring politician. He joined the Labour Party at nineteen years of age and within only four years he had been elected a local councillor for Bedwas and Machen. Elected the Labour MP for Caerphilly in 1983, he held a series of positions in the Labour shadow cabinet before securing appointment in May 1997 as the first Labour Secretary of State for eighteen years.

A committed devolutionist from his youth, he was primarily responsible for piloting the contentious Government of Wales Bill through parliament and co-ordinating the campaign which led to a narrow ‘Yes’ vote in the 1997 referendum. He was thus at the centre of events during a momentous period and served as a member of the Welsh Assembly throughout its first term (1999-2003). His subsequent resignation from the Assembly in 2003 gave him the freedom to speak as a private citizen.

In a hard-hitting, often critical lecture, Ron Davies examined the attitude of the Blair government towards devolution, and the complex series of events which saw the setting up of a National Assembly in 1999. He looked at the impact of the Assembly to date and some of the keynote policies of the Labour group, often suggesting amendments. He also discussed concepts of Welsh nationhood and the recent role and possible fate of the Welsh language which he himself has learned in recent years.

The lecture has assumed a greater significance as Ron Davies’s last major statement in public prior to his announcement, in January 2004, that he was resigning from the Labour Party after forty years’ membership.

Extracts from the lecture are published on page 3 of this Newsletter. As an innovation, as part of the Library’s policy to enhance access to its publications, the whole text of the lecture may be read on the NLW web pages in the section on the Welsh Political Archive. It will also be published in the next number of the National Library of Wales Journal.
The Welsh Political Archive was set up in 1983 to co-ordinate the collection of documentary evidence of all kinds about politics in Wales. It collects the records and papers of political parties, politicians, quasi-political organisations, campaigns and pressure groups; leaflets, pamphlets, ephemera, posters, photographs, and tapes of radio and television programmes.

Advisory committee members:
Mr Andrew Green (Librarian),
Dr Denis Balsom, Mr Ian Barton,
Emeritus Professor Deirdre Beddoe,
Miss Beata Brookes, Mr Alun Burge,
Mr Cynog Dafis, Mr Darron Dupré,
Mr Aled Eirug, Mr Tom Ellis,
Mr Rhys Evans, Mr Gwyn Griffiths,
Mr Adam Higgit, Professor Deian Hopkin,
Mr Leigh Jeffes,
Professor Aled G Jones,
Mr D L Jones, Dr Richard Wyn Jones, Mr David Melding AM,
Lord Morgan of Aberdyfi, Mrs Julie Morgan MP, Emeritus Professor D Hywel E Roberts, Professor Duncan Tanner, Dr Guto Thomas and three members of the NLW staff.

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The 36th meeting of the advisory committee to the Welsh Political Archive was convened at the Library on 7 November 2003. The meeting saw the largest turnout ever of members, and five new members were welcomed: Mr Alun Burge, Mr Rhys Evans, Mr David Melding, Dr Guto Thomas and Professor Duncan Tanner.

Members stood in silent tribute to the memory of the late Mr D. Elwyn Jones, a loyal, supportive member of the committee since its inception in 1985. As his successor, it was resolved to invite Mr Leigh Jeffes, Director of the Conservative Party Wales, to join the committee. Mr Jeffes has since kindly accepted the invitation, and we look forward to his company and contribution.

It was confirmed that Emeritus Professor Deirdre Beddoe would deliver the eighteenth annual lecture in English on 5 November 2004 on a theme relating to the role of women in Welsh politics. Mr Cynog Dafis will deliver the nineteenth annual lecture in Welsh on 4 November 2005 on the relationship between Plaid Cymru and the Green Party. Both are long serving members of the WPA advisory committee. Henceforth lectures will be held at the new auditorium of the National Library (rather than at the Old College) which is currently nearing completion. A warm welcome is extended to all.

On 17 October 2003, Dr J. Graham Jones, Head of the Welsh Political Archive, attended a meeting at the Institute of Historical Research, London, of the advisory committee to a project sponsored by the ESRC entitled ‘National Identity and Institutional Politics: Welsh Devolution, 1885-2001’. The project is based at the School of History and Welsh History, Bangor, and is led by Professor Duncan Tanner, Bangor, and Professor Chris Williams, the University of Glamorgan.

The project has employed two research assistants: Dr Andrew Edwards, based at Bangor, and Dr James McConnel, who was based at the University of Hertfordshire where he worked under the supervision of Dr Matthew Cragoe. The project has made extensive use of the archives of the British Conservative Party and the Harold Wilson Papers, both held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, newly available records in the custody of the Public Record Office, the papers of numerous Welsh Labour politicians and constituency records, the records generated by the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ campaigns in 1979, and the Plaid Cymru archive in the custody of the NLW. A large number of personal interviews has also been undertaken.

It is eventually intended to publish two substantial monographs during 2005: Debating Nationhood and Government, 1885-1939 and Welsh Devolution and British Politics since 1945. Both will contain a large number of chapters by members of the project team and some by additional contributors.
BOOKS

A biography for Clem


This is the first ever biography of E. Clement Davies (1884-1962), Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire, 1929-62, and party leader, 1945-56.

It draws extensively on the large collection of Davies’s personal and political papers deposited at the Library by his widow and son in 1967, 1977 and 1996.

The volume is thoroughly researched, written in a lively, captivating style and well illustrated with photographs taken from the Davies family album. There is a nice balance between the subject’s colourful personal and family life, and his notable career as a politician, party leader, constituency MP and public figure.

The key events in Davies’s life are carefully re-examined, including the tragic deaths of three of his four children, his role in helping to oust Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain from office in May 1940, and his decision to reject the offer of a Cabinet position as Minister of Education made by Churchill in October 1951. Overall, the volume is informative, entertaining and fills a significant gap.

The author now intends to research the life and career of Major Gwilym Lloyd-George, first Viscount Tenby (1894-1967), another neglected British and Welsh politician some of whose papers are also held at the NLW. We eagerly anticipate the fruits of this further research project.

Extracts from Ron Davies’s Lecture

For [John Smith’s] successor Tony Blair, devolution had none of the passion and imagination which had so clearly fired his predecessor. For Blair and ‘New Labour’, devolution was an unwanted inheritance which might, at worst, frighten the key electors of ‘Middle England’, whatever its importance in Scotland and Wales. The balance of power had shifted, and political space had been created for the old divisions to emerge.

The Assembly may not be exciting, but it is accessible. The committee system in particular has been a great success in shedding some light on the process of policy making, and Wales now leads the field in the art of government consultation with the public.

There is little to suggest that the inequalities bequeathed to New Labour in 1997 have been diminished either in social or spatial terms. Indeed there is strong evidence to suggest that they have grown rather than diminished, and that on the basis of present policies are set to continue.

Together the Health Service and Local Government budgets consume nearly 75 per cent of the Assembly’s budget. If it is right and socially just to allocate this expenditure on a needs basis in Wales, how can it be right and socially just not to seek the allocation of funds in the UK on the same basis?

We currently have the worst of all worlds: an unimaginative and unambitious legislative programme constrained by New Labour’s Government in Cardiff’s desire not to put Wales’s interests before its party loyalty to New Labour’s Government in London, and developing conventions in both Parliament and Assembly which ensure that what little legislation there is, is not subject to appropriate debate and scrutiny.

There are hard choices, and I want to touch on the hardest one of all – the Welsh language. Bilingualism is the European norm. Our ownership of Europe’s oldest living language with its unique contribution to our cultural and literary life and our simultaneous possession of English, the language of international business, commerce and telecommunications, should be a source of both pride and advantage. But why are we so lacking in confidence and understanding that we fail to see the capacity of our potential bilingualism as a force to unite us and expand our opportunities for personal, cultural, educational and economic advancement?
Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas, Plaid Cymru AM for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, has donated to the National Library a large group of fascinating photographs which had been discovered by staff while spring cleaning at the Plaid Cymru office at Wind Street, Ammanford.

Most of the hundreds of photographs, all in pristine condition, span the period from the early 1950s to the mid 1970s, and many feature Dr Gwynfor Evans. A large number relate to his triumph in the 1966 Carmarthen by-election. The photographs were originally carefully collected and preserved by Mr Cyril Jones, Dr Evans’s long serving constituency agent, and probably originated from the old Plaid Cymru Office at Water Street, Carmarthen. Mr Thomas represents in the National Assembly part of the constituency represented in parliament by Dr Gwynfor Evans, 1966–70 and again 1974–79.

Some of the photographs also show the campaign meetings organised by the tenacious Parliament for Wales agitation in the early 1950s and others are portraits of other local worthies, among them Dr D. J. Williams of Fishguard (1885–1970). Most of them have never been published, and the Library’s staff would appreciate assistance in identifying a few of the photographs.

Mr D. Elwyn Jones
Mr Jones, a long standing member of the WPA advisory committee, who died suddenly in the spring of 2003, has bequeathed to the Library the political papers which he accumulated as Conservative Party agent for north Wales and political agent to Sir Wyn Roberts. They include correspondence, diary material, photographs, circulars issued by the Conservative Party to local agents, records concerning a number of election campaigns, and printed material.

David Melding
Mr Melding, a recent recruit to the WPA advisory committee, has presented a copy of the text of his keynote lecture ‘New Dawn or Sunset Boulevard?: What role for the Welsh Conservative Party?’ which he delivered to the Institute of Welsh Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, on 27 October 2004.

He has also donated a copy of his fascinating ‘Briefing Note on the case against a Welsh Assembly’ which he prepared back in August 1997. Both documents have been designated NLW ex 2243.

Cynog Dafis Papers
Mr Cynog Dafis has added several groups of papers to his archive at the National Library. They include a group of letters, dating from the 1960s, from Mrs Elizabeth E. Williams, Gwaelod-y-garth, widow of Professor Griffith John Williams, mainly responding to his activities within Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg. They also contain copies of the first ever manifesto of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, dated 1972, prepared by Cynog Dafis, and the introduction to its English translation by Harri Webb, together with related press cuttings and correspondence giving reactions to their appearance.

The papers also include files which he had accumulated before his election to parliament in 1992, and others which illustrate the relationship between Plaid Cymru and the Green Party between 1992 and 1997.

Sir Goronwy Daniel
The Library has received from his children a small group of the papers of the late Sir Goronwy Daniel (1914–2003), Principal of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth from 1969 until 1979. They reflect his highly distinguished career in Welsh public life, notably his involvement in Welsh higher education, the early years of the Welsh Office (where he served as the first Permanent Secretary, 1964–69), the arts, broadcasting, economic and statistical studies, and devolution.

We advise readers to enquire about the conditions placed on the papers before visiting the Library. Many recent WPA acquisitions have restrictions on access or photocopying.