This article is essentially the text of a talk given at the annual conference of the British Book Trade Index, held in Manchester in July 1992. It can be regarded as a commercial for a forthcoming publication, *A nation and its books*, a collection of essays on the book in Wales. The work will be printed and published by the National Library of Wales and the date of publication will probably be 1995, to coincide with the city of Swansea's hosting of the Year of Literature. As part of the celebrations, Ty Llên is to be established in Swansea. The literal translation of Ty Llên is House of Literature, a fair description of a centre which will combine the functions of a Museum of the Book with an active Writers' Centre. Naturally, the National Library of Wales will be involved in the venture and the publication of *A nation and its books* will be timely.

Welshmen do not have to be militant nationalists to be annoyed on occasions when Wales is regarded for cultural purposes as part of England. The fact is that Wales, albeit a small country, has its own distinctive culture. The Welsh language, one of the oldest living languages in Europe, has survived invasion and settlement by Romans, Irish, Norsemen, Flemings, Normans, English, Spanish, Jews, Italians, Chinese and Japanese. Welsh has survived beyond Wales amongst emigrants in Patagonia, Australia, Canada and the United States of America. Over the centuries it has been the vehicle for imaginative prose and intricate verse. What is more, the Welsh language heritage has been complemented by a rich corpus of Anglo-Welsh literature.

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1 *A nation and its books: a history of the book in Wales*, edited by Philip Henry Jones and Eiluned Rees. The title of the volume pays tribute to a pioneering study of the history of the book in Wales published in 1916. It also stresses the underlying theme of the book: Wales, despite its links with the British book trade, constitutes a separate entity, with features which are sufficiently distinctive to preclude it from being considered as merely a region of Britain. It is intended to cover the history of the book in Wales from the post-Roman period to the present and each chapter will be contributed by an expert in the field. Although the book-trade – the production and dissemination of the book as a physical artefact – will necessarily be at the heart of the study, contributors have been encouraged to explore the broader social and intellectual contexts of the written and printed word in Wales. The volume will, therefore, include discussion of topics such as authorship and patronage, readership and book ownership, the role of the book in scholarship and the dissemination of knowledge, its contribution to the preservation of the literary and cultural heritage and its interaction with oral and popular culture.
A nation and its books will make fascinating reading. All aspects of the book in Wales will be covered, from the earliest inscriptions to the latest computer typesetting. So wide is its scope that I was not able during the course of an hour to give a resumé of the contents. On the other hand, I was anxious to convey its flavour and I decided to choose certain books and use them as pegs on which to hang the talk. They are not seminal works, merely works which I found useful to illustrate the story of the Welsh book, finger-posts rather than milestones. The choice is highly personal, bordering on the idiosyncratic.

I began with *Llyfr Aneirin* [The book of Aneirin]. About six years ago the Conservation Section of the National Library of Wales (where I was then employed) undertook to repair and rebind *Llyfr Aneirin* for Cardiff City Library. With eager anticipation we awaited the arrival of one of the ‘Four Ancient Books of Wales’, part of our precious literary heritage. When the book arrived, we looked at it with disbelief and disappointment. We beheld a small, unprepossessing thirteenth century vellum manuscript, in a nondescript seventeenth century binding. Apart from some coloured initials, the text was devoid of decoration. It was hardly in the same league as the *Lindisfarne Gospels* or the *Book of Kells* and yet, by the time that manuscript was ready for a triumphal return to Cardiff, we cherished it for the treasure it undoubtedly is.

Our attitude changed because we had learned enough to view the work in context. Daniel Huws, Keeper of Manuscripts, related its known history to us, while Julian Thomas, Head of Conservation, analysed its physical make-up during the process of pulling, repairing and rebinding. Between them, they trained our eyes to see beyond the obvious, and that was the aim of my talk: unless I could persuade my audience to see beyond the obvious, they were unlikely to appreciate Welsh books.

The characteristic Welsh book is not a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. The text is accorded priority and aesthetic considerations get short shrift. There are reasons for this. The Welsh, unlike their fellow-Celts, the Irish and the Scots, until recently were backward in the visual arts. Also, Wales was for centuries a relatively poor country and book-production had to be subsidized; the subsidies did not rise to frills.

Although they lagged behind in the visual arts, the Welsh were sophisticated in the art of words; Welsh literature goes way back into the Dark Ages. There is incontrovertible evidence in the writings of Gildas that poetry was flourishing in the sixth century, while Nennius, writing c. 800, actually names some of the early bards. Amongst the names is that of Aneirin. Aneirin wrote a heroic poem *The Gododdin*, which describes the aftermath of a disastrous battle fought in Catterick against the Saxons c. 600
A.D., in which were slain 300 warriors, the warband of Mynyddawg Mwynfawr, ruler of the area around Edinburgh. The poem is preserved in *Llyfr Aneirin*.

Here is an extract:

Gwyr a aeth Catraeth oedd ffraeth eu llu;
Glasfedd eu hancwyn, a gwenwyn fu.
Trichant trwy beiriant yn catâu –
A gwedi elwch tawelwch fu.
Cyd elwynt i lannau i benydu,
Dadl diau angau i eu treiddu.

[Men went to Catraeth, keen was their company.
They were fed on fresh mead, and it proved poison -
Three hundred warriors ordered for warfare,
And after the revelling, there was silence.
Although they might go to shrines to do penance,
This much was certain, death would transfix them.]

One does not have to know Welsh to recognize that that poem was written in intricate metre, though some knowledge of the language is needed to recognize the greatness of the poetry. This is great poetry, not doggerel verse. Lest I be accused of bias, I invoke the sentiments of someone who was only one quarter Welsh and three-quarters-Norman, Giraldus Cambrensis, writing in the twelfth century: 'In their narrative poems and their declamations they [the Welsh] are so inventive and ingenious that, when using their native tongue, they produce works of art which are at once attractive and highly original, both in the choice of words and the sentiments expressed'. Medieval Welsh poetry has been likened to an oral version of Celtic inter-lacing patterns, words weaving in and out and yet forming an artistic, coherent whole. The same love of and facility with language is evident in medieval Welsh prose, notably *Pedair cainc y Mabinogi* [The four branches of the Mabinogi], more familiarly known as the *Mabinogion*. *Llyfr Aneirin* and other Welsh manuscripts may be physically uninspiring, but they have rescued from a predominantly oral tradition masterpieces of poetry and prose.

Poetry was a craft and poets were instructed in its rules as meticulously as a carpenter in the use of tools. *The laws of Hywel Dda*, codified in the tenth century and modified in the thirteenth century, clearly set out the duties of the bards. Eighth amongst the twenty-four officers in the King's court was

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The Bard of the Household. . . He is entitled to sit next to the captain of the household at the three special feasts, so as to have the harp put into his hand. . . When a song is required to be sung, the chaired bard starts, first of God, with the second of the King to whom the court belongs, and if he has nothing to sing of him, let him sing of another king. After the chaired bard, the bard of the household is to sing three songs of some other kind. If it happens that the Queen wants a song, let the bard of the household go and sing to her without stint, and that quietly, so that the hall is not disturbed by him. 4

The chaired bard was a visitor at court, a bard who had reached the top of his profession, won a chair. Bards had to perform to order, rather like the poet laureate today, though with greater frequency and with greater motivation, since their bed and board depended on their ability to please their patrons.

This incomparable poetic tradition would have disappeared with the way of life of which it was part had it not been for the scribes of the Middle Ages and, equally important, their patrons. Predictably, the patrons were the church and the aristocracy. The Celtic church laid great store on scholarship. Llancarfan and Llanilltud Fawr and later Llanbadarn Fawr were renowned as centres of learning. Alfred the Great obtained his spiritual adviser, Asser, from St Davids. Even when the Normans changed the structure of church life in Wales and replaced Celtic-style monastic communities with Benedictine, Augustinian and Cistercian monasteries, they did not succeed in separating the church from Welsh culture. Welsh princes were generous patrons of the new orders and the Cistercians in particular became closely identified with Welsh interests. The Augustinian priory at Carmarthen housed the oldest extant Welsh manuscript, the thirteenth century Black book of Carmarthen which contains, amongst other things, verses about the enigmatic Merlin.5

Welsh kings became demoted to lords and the power of the lords declined as the might of England closed in on its disorganized neighbour. The court of the lord lost its former glory. Bards, however, were not declared redundant; they continued to earn a living by writing eulogies to potential patrons. Eulogies invariably included references to a patron’s ancestors, for Welshmen were obsessed with ancestry. Giraldus Cambrensis noted that ‘Even the common people know their family-tree by heart and can readily recite from memory the list of their grandfathers, great-grandfathers, great-great-grandfathers, back to the sixth or seventh generation.’6 What could be more natural than a lord wanting to keep a permanent record of poems relating to himself and his family? He would hardly

5 The manuscript is now in the National Library of Wales.
6 Gerald of Wales, 251.
begrudge paying for the services of a professional scribe in order to secure a measure of immortality. To be fair to the Welsh lords, they also commissioned copies of non-eulogistic material; most of them were genuine lovers of literature and many were poets in their own right.

In 1477 Caxton brought to England the craft of printing by moveable type. In 1546 the first Welsh book was printed, and that little book, known by its opening words *Yny lhywyr hwnn* [In this book] is the second peg in my selection. It was printed not in Wales but in London, by Edward Whitchurch, who held the monopoly for printing prayer-books. The volume is even less interesting visually than *Llyfr Aneirin* but again appearances are deceptive because it is a crucial landmark in the history of Welsh culture.

The work is linked with the past in that it is written in Welsh and in that the compiler and publisher, Sir John Price, was a member of the gentry. However, it is a departure from the past in being a product of the Reformation, compiled by a Renaissance man. Moreover, Sir John Price was no minor landowner, content to run an estate in a remote Welsh valley; he was active in London, at the heart of government, one of the many Welshmen trusted to hold power under the Tudors. He played a crucial role in the dissolution of the monasteries, at the same time salvaging from the dispersed libraries of abandoned religious houses priceless manuscripts, including the afore-mentioned *Black book of Carmarthen*. He was an antiquary of international repute, a writer and book-collector. Significantly, he mostly wrote in Latin for an European audience. He was also an ardent Protestant, who believed his fellow-countrymen should have access to the Scriptures in their own tongue. *Yny lhywyr hwnn* contained the essential tenets of Christianity as embodied in the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer, together with the Welsh alphabet, which is different from the English alphabet in that it includes letters such as dd, ll, rh, th. Other Welsh books soon appeared in print, scholarly and religious works by Welsh Renaissance scholars. In 1588, a thousand copies of Bishop William Morgan’s Welsh translation of the Welsh Bible was published.7

The importance of the Welsh Bible cannot be over-estimated. In addition to giving ordinary people a substitute for the painted churches and ceremonial which had filled their lives and which they had suddenly and, to them, inexplicably lost, the Welsh Bible gave them a unifying language. Spoken Welsh at this time was a miscellany of mutually incomprehensible dialects. The language of the Bible was based on the literary language in which poetry and prose had been transmitted and henceforth it was to serve the whole community.

7 *Y Beibl Cyssegr-lan* (London, 1588.)
Sixteenth century Welsh printed works were products of the Renaissance and Reformation and they were all printed outside Wales, with the exception of one or two clandestine Catholic books. The authors were scholars, imbued with a love of learning and an antiquarian interest in their country’s illustrious past, inspired too by a missionary zeal to promote their religious ideals, whether those ideals be Protestant or Roman Catholic. Catholics had to flee to the Continent and the most attractively-produced Welsh books of the period bear an Italian or Parisian imprint. London retained its monopoly of authorized printing, save for a few concessions to Oxford and Cambridge. Printing still had not reached Wales, where manuscript copyists continued to ply their trade until the early decades of the nineteenth century. The vogue for book-collecting escalated and gentry vied with one another to amass fine libraries. They jealously guarded their prized manuscripts and showed little inclination to offer them to the world in printed form.

Welsh book-production, whether in print or in manuscript, had to be heavily subsidized. The costs of producing the 1588 Bible were borne by a few philanthropic Welshmen. Printing costs were higher than usual because Welsh was a foreign language as far as compositors were concerned, and the outlay would not be recouped from sales. Literacy was slowly spreading amongst the ‘gwerin’, the common people, but book-buying was still a luxury. Patronage by individuals became less and less feasible as the need for Welsh books grew and a more formal system evolved. In 1674 gentry and clergy formed the Welsh Trust, a Protestant, inter-denominational body, with the aim of establishing schools, and publishing and distributing edifying literature. The activities were continued and extended by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, set up in 1698 by the established church. While the latter was not exclusively Welsh, zealous Welsh members ensured that the interests of their fellow-countrymen were well represented. Both societies published much-wanted Bibles in addition to translations of popular religious classics. As books had to be published as cheaply as possible, little attention was paid to their design.

Within a year of the lapse of the Licensing Act, a Welsh book was printed in Shrewsbury. Shrewsbury was and still is a thriving market town, a Mecca for Welsh as well as English traders and shoppers. The man who brought Welsh printing to Shrewsbury originally hailed from Merioneth. Thomas Jones had switched from tailoring to bookselling while working in London. He rightly surmised that the spread of literacy would lead to a demand for Welsh books of a different nature from those sponsored by religious societies or subscribed to by antiquaries and litterateurs. Amongst his most imaginative publications were a non-scholastic Welsh–English dictionary, a Welsh almanac and an anthology of popular Welsh poetry.
The anthology was printed in Shrewsbury in 1696 and bears the imprint of Thomas Jones, for he took advantage of the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 to set up a press. A later edition of the anthology serves as the next peg: *Llyfr carolau a dyriau duwiol* [A book of carols and religious lyrics], printed by Thomas Durston in 1729. My choice was governed by the fact that three Shrewsbury printers are linked with the publication: Thomas Jones, the original author; John Rhydderch, a fellow-countryman who edited and enlarged the work, and Thomas Durston, whose printing career spanned over half a century, from 1711 to 1767.

From the moment Thomas Jones set up his printing business, Shrewsbury dominated the North Wales book scene, supplementing rather than rivalling the London Welsh book-trade. The standard of printing was execrable. Durston was apprenticed to Thomas Jones and he was the most prolific of the printers, printing known best-sellers, almanacs, ballads and chapbooks and even a pirated Welsh New Testament. But Welsh printing still needed patronage. Usually it was the author or translator who acted as publisher and his method of subsidy was publication by subscription. Significantly, the names of Welsh gentry, even those who were anglicized, regularly appear in subscription lists. Their continuing support is often overlooked and yet, without it, Welsh publishing would have been in dire straits.

At this stage there are parallel streams of Welsh printing. From Shrewsbury flowed books which Welsh people wanted to buy and read; from London came books which benefacting gentry and clergy thought people should read. From London too and from Oxford emanated books of antiquarian interest, the most noteworthy of which is Edward Lhuyd’s *Archaeologia Britannica* (Oxford, 1707.)

John Rhydderch started printing in Shrewsbury in 1715. He was primarily a litterateur, an editor, translator and poet. He maintained contact with a literary circle in West Wales and it was members of that circle who introduced commercial printing to Wales. Two ballads were printed in 1718 in the village of Trefhedyn, Cardiganshire. The printer was Isaac Carter. Carter was a deeply religious man and his motivation for printing was the spiritual well-being of his compatriots, which is just as well, as he would not have made his fortune from the venture. However, a latent business instinct, for which Cardiganshire is renowned, prompted him to leave his remote village in 1725 for the most prosperous commercial centre in South Wales, Carmarthen.

He had been forestalled. One of men who had encouraged him to become a printer, Nicholas Thomas, had himself taken up the trade in Carmarthen, his first publications rolling off the press in 1721. In 1724 Nicholas Thomas printed an item ascribed to John Bunyan, *Dull priodas ysprydol, rhwng Siloh a Sion* [The spiritual marriage between Siloh and Sion]. It was chosen as my next peg.
partly as an example of the kind of popular religious writing that typified Welsh publishing throughout the eighteenth century, and partly because it contains an advertisement for the bookbinding and bookselling business of Crispianus Jones. Nicholas Thomas learned to print in Shrewsbury, probably with John Rhydderch. Bearing in mind the standard of printing in Shrewsbury, our expectations of his expertise are not high - and we are not disappointed. Indeed, his presswork was rife with printing infelicities. Despite his failings as a printer, he deserves respect. Things are never easy for pioneers and noteworthy is the fact that the printing business did not die when he did, which was the fate of several early Welsh printing ventures. Thomas had the right ideas about printing. He used ornaments; admittedly they were not of the best quality or style, but they indicate that he was accepting in principle the desirability for some embellishment of text. He took pains to woo potential subscribers with advertisements for newly-acquired founts of type. He offered a binding service. His binder was probably the afore-mentioned Crispianus Jones, who combined bookbinding with selling second-hand school-books from his house or at the market. Printing, with its ancillary trades, had arrived in Wales and within a century was to be an integral feature of every town.

Literacy made dramatic strides during the eighteenth century; both the established Church and the various Nonconformist bodies wanted literate congregations and consequently promoted basic education. Newly-literate church and chapel-goers, though far from being affluent, were prepared to part with hard-earned sixpences in order to buy books. Subscription publishing was ideal for them. There was no shortage of local agents or itinerant booksellers to help with distribution. Confident that there was a market for Welsh books, authors took heart, while printers and booksellers went from strength to strength. Booksellers’ catalogues have survived from the early years of the 19th century as tangible evidence of a flourishing, well-organised, country-wide book-trade, covering new and second-hand books.

The next item is not a printed book; it is the Sales Book for the years 1816–40 of the Williams family of printers in Aberystwyth. Samuel Williams was invited to Aberystwyth in 1809 by John James, a Baptist Minister and bookbinder, who, as an author himself, decided it was time Aberystwyth had a press. James, in securing the services of a properly apprenticed printer, was tacitly acknowledging that the age of the enthusiastic amateur was over. In 1762 John Ross, a Scotsman, came to Carmarthen, proudly advertising himself as the only printer in those parts who had served an apprenticeship. He set a precedent; henceforth, any sensible aspiring printer

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8 National Library of Wales Add. MSS 2844E.
would have to be a professional. At least four Welsh printers are known to have served an apprenticeship under the Welsh-speaking William Collister Jones in Chester. Samuel Williams did not have to travel so far; he found facilities for apprenticeship on his doorstep, in Carmarthen.

Samuel Williams was not by any means a major printer. His output was modest in quantity and quality. However, his sales book is another pointer to the professionalism of the Welsh book-trade. He had trade links throughout Wales with printers, booksellers, bookbinders, itinerant booksellers and ballad-mongers; he had trade links with London, though not to the same extent as other South Walian printers. From the sales book we gather that he had a shop from which he sold a variety of stationery, but it is patently obvious that he made his living mainly from jobbing printing.

Because jobbing printing is ephemeral and lacks the literary glamour of book-production, its importance can be underestimated. Gentry, clergy, tradesmen, magistrates, solicitors, auctioneers, schoolmasters, etc. benefited tremendously from the facility of obtaining locally in English or Welsh the ledgers, forms, reports, tickets, notices and posters essential to their trade or profession. Printers could make a nice, comfortable living from jobbing printing. The more enterprising of them offered a translation service when both English and Welsh versions of a document were required.

Samuel Williams died suddenly in 1820 and was succeeded by his widow, who in due course took their son Philip into partnership. Dynasties of printers were much in evidence by the nineteenth century, which leads us to the greatest of the scholar-printers, Thomas Gee, junior. He was apprenticed to his father in Denbigh, but he also spent several months in London in 1837, learning all he could of the technical developments which were rapidly revolutionising the British printing industry. He assumed responsibility for running his father's business in 1838 and dominated what Philip Henry Jones designates 'The golden age of Welsh printing'.

Gee published amongst many, many other things two editions of my next peg, *Y gwyddionadur Cymreig*, a ten-volume Welsh encyclopaedia. I could have chosen *Y traethodydd* [The essayist], the Welsh counterpart to the *Edinburgh review*, or *Baner ac amserau Cymru* [The banner and times of Wales], the newspaper which supported the Radical, Nonconformist cause, both of which survived into the twentieth century, as testimony to Gee's enterprise. I chose instead *Y gwyddionadur*, as a worthy symbol of this 'golden age', when the working man, despite the hardship which was often his lot, was fired by a thirst for knowledge. It was a time when the man in the street felt strongly about moral issues and loved his native traditions. Thomas Gee was himself a product of the age; his impassioned defence of radicalism and nonconformity made him a legend in his
lifetime. He and printers of the calibre of William Spurrell in Carmarthen, Hugh Humphreys of Caernarfon and William Rees of Llandeilo gave Welshmen unparalleled access to newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets and books in their own tongue, their normal means of communication. The above named were not alone in the crusade; they were but the biggest entrepreneurs, for every town could boast of its printers, booksellers, stationers, bookbinders, libraries, print-sellers and newspapers. Religious and political strife, both national and parochial, boosted the publishing industry, while jobbing printing grew more and more lucrative with increasing commercial prosperity.

Gee's registers have survived. They throw light on the sophistication of his distribution network, relations with authors and the growth of the business. He combined idealism with a shrewd business acumen and he was well aware of the necessity to move with the times by investing heavily in up-to-date machinery and adopting modern working practices. Printing and publishing were primarily commercial ventures; philanthropic patronage was welcomed when it was forthcoming, but printers and publishers certainly did not count on it for survival.

One of the contributors to the Gwyddionadur was Owen Morgan Edwards (1858–1920), a name proclaimed in every Welsh school as that of a modern hero. He was a cultivated man, widely travelled, a Fellow and tutor in History in Lincoln College, Oxford, before being appointed Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales. He was a prolific writer, in Welsh and English. Ironically, I am making special mention of one of his few failures, the magazine entitled Wales, which lasted only from 1894 to 1897. 'As far as illustrations and printing are concerned,' he says in the preface to the first volume, 'the editors and publishers are determined to make Wales a credit to Welsh printing,' as indeed it proved to be. The Welsh counterpart, Cymru, ran with greater success from 1891 to 1920. Sir Owen Edwards (he was knighted in 1916) was inspired by the ideals of Ruskin and William Morris while at Oxford. His contemporary, the Liberal politician, Thomas Edward Ellis (1859–99) was likewise influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement. The two of them brought elegance to mainstream Welsh printing, taking a keen personal interest in all aspects of the publications with which they were associated. A review in the Athenaeum of T.E. Ellis's edition of the works of Morgan Llwyd (1899) contains the revealing disclosure that 'the artistic appearance of this volume is in a large measure attributable to the personal influence of its editor'. Jarvis & Foster, Bangor, published the volume in question, as one of a series of reprints of old Welsh texts, sponsored by the University of Wales.

The registers are in the National Library of Wales. They have formed the basis of a thesis and numerous articles by Philip Henry Jones.

The aesthetic values preached by Edwards and Ellis and the example set by Jarvis & Foster had no lasting effect on Welsh book-production, the general standard of which subsequently plummeted. Admittedly the University of Wales Press was set up as a publishing body in 1921 and redressed the balance to some degree, but its publications were restricted in interest and circulation. By now, there was a steady decline in the use of the Welsh language. Yet again in its chequered history, the Welsh book would need sponsorship in order to survive.

The Welsh book has survived, indeed it is currently thriving and for this a good deal of credit must be given to the Welsh Books Council. The Council, which came into being about thirty years ago, is supported by the Welsh Arts Council and local authorities. Four departments, Design, Editorial, Publicity and Marketing, provide a central service for authors and publishers of books in Welsh and English and, since 1979, the Council has assumed responsibility for administering the Government grant for Welsh-language publications. Its quarterly journal, Llais llyfrau: Welsh book news, is my next peg. The learned articles in Welsh and English on Welsh and Anglo-Welsh literature are informative, as are the book reviews. Extremely useful are lists of current publications in both languages. Llais llyfrau is an eminently readable journal, devoid of the elitist cant of most literary magazines and reflecting the practical approach to publishing which is the hallmark of the Welsh Books Council.

I mentioned Anglo-Welsh literature. There have been several definitions of Anglo-Welsh literature and I offer yet another: Anglo-Welsh literature is literature produced in the English language by people who are Welsh by birth, blood or adoption. The metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century had Welsh blood coursing in their veins; Lady Charlotte Guest, nineteenth century translator of the Mabinogion, was Welsh by adoption, having come to Wales as the wife of the industrial tycoon, Sir Josiah John Guest; twentieth century Anglo-Welsh writers tend to be resident in Wales, in fact, mostly in South Wales. What they all have in common is a passion for words; it is as though the muse which inspires Welsh-language poets had breathed life into those Welshmen who sought expression in the English tongue.

The Anglo-Welsh poet and film director, John Ormond, wrote and illustrated the work which forms my last peg: Cathedral builders, printed at Gwasg Gregynog [the Gregynog Press] in 1991. The name Gregynog is familiar to bibliophiles. The original Gregynog Press flourished in the thirties, in the country house after which it was named, the Montgomeryshire home of the wealthy Davies
The sisters' mentor was an urbane Welsh politician, Thomas Jones, secretary to the Cabinet. All three fell under the spell of the Arts and Crafts Movement and they made a conscious effort to entice to the Gregynog Press skilled printers, illustrators, engravers and bookbinders to pool their talents in the production of masterpieces of craftsmanship. The demise of the press with the advent of the 1939–45 War was greatly lamented. Ironically the National Library of Wales was to benefit; two Gregynog-trained men were appointed to the staff after the war, who in due course became Head of Printing and Head of Binding.

In 1974 the University of Wales brought Gregynog back into the world of printing by forming Gwasg Gregynog as a limited company. The house had been bequeathed to the University as a conference centre and it was decided to revive the press in the disused printing premises. Gwasg Gregynog aspires to the high standard of printing of its illustrious predecessor, but it is different in other respects. For a start, it has to be self-sufficient; there are no Davies sisters to subsidize losses. Also, the new Gwasg Gregynog is predominantly Welsh in flavour, laying great store on commissioning and publishing works by Welsh and Anglo-Welsh authors. Likewise, illustrators and fine binders with Welsh connections are commissioned.

In choosing Cathedral builders I am paying tribute to Anglo-Welsh literature and to a notable private press in Wales. I am also paying a personal tribute to the author, a great man, whose death just before the book was launched was recognised as a major loss to Welsh culture. John Ormond was an artist as well as a poet. He illustrated his poems and helped design the book. Wales has nurtured masters of the word for a very long time, whereas its artistic tradition is comparatively recent. John Ormond combines the old and the new.

Anglo-Welsh literature will survive because it attracts an international readership. What the future holds for Welsh-language publishing, no-one can foretell. Welsh is being taught in schools and there are Welsh-language channels on radio and television. Modern printing technology and the efforts of the Welsh Books Council could herald another golden age, though optimism wavers as one town after another sees the closure of long-established printing-houses. At this moment, however, Welsh books are still being published and read.

I ended my talk by doing what my ancestors loved doing, telling a story. The tale was related by Giraldus Cambrensis in the Description of Wales:

During the military expedition which Henry II, King of the English, led against them [the Welsh] in South Wales in our own lifetime, an old man living in Pencader...who had joined the King's forces against his own people, because of
their evil way of life, was asked what he thought of the royal army, whether it could withstand the rebel troops, and what the outcome of the war would be. 'My Lord King', he replied, 'this nation may now be harassed, weakened and decimated by your soldiery, as it has so often been by others in former times; but it will never be totally destroyed by the wrath of man, unless at the same time it is punished by the wrath of God. Whatever else may come to pass, I do not think that on the Day of Direst Judgement any race other than the Welsh, or any other language, will give answer to the Supreme Judge of all for this small corner of the earth'.

10 Gerald of Wales, 274.