

## CHAIR'S REPORT

**Alun Burge**

Firstly our thanks to Stephanie for volunteering to produce an on-line newsletter for Llafur, for the first time. This new outlet will allow Llafur members, and others interested in the Society, and its activities around the history of the people of Wales, to keep up to date with our work.

For 38 years, Llafur has been run by members committed to considering the past with a view to illuminating the present and as a basis for shaping the future. Llafur is a Society that welcomes anyone with an interest in the history of the people of Wales.

We have always had a diverse membership, including, amongst others, academics and activists. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Society had close links to the labour movement, although with the recomposition of industrial Britain, so too did the Society change. This was reflected by the change of name to Llafur: The Welsh *People's* History Society. We still retain our values, with our diversity of approach now reflected in our looking to collaborate with others in putting on events. Thus, we, and our day schools still remain relevant to the issues of today. Our most recent conference in Swansea, with the Joseph Herman Foundation, in November 2007, on Visualising the Valleys: Life, Work and Community was packed to the rafters. A series of excellent presentations was led off by Peter Wakelin who looked at the work of those 1940s immigrant refugee artists Joseph Herman

and Heinz Koppel and posed the question as to the, as yet unknown, contribution of the current generation of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants to Wales. Another recent, well attended, conference held in Blaenavon, with the Bevan Foundation, looked at Regenerating the Valleys past, present and future, and attracted historians, policy makers and community activists. As a Wales-wide organisation, Llafur is considering the future events taking place in the north and west of Wales.

Our next 'joint event', with CyMAL takes a somewhat different form. We are pleased that the new document of the Welsh Assembly Government, *One Wales*, has a commitment to *establish an all-Wales Collection of People's History, backed by a permanent curatorial staff with responsibility for the promotion and development of the collection*'.

The Society has been in discussions with CyMAL, which is the part of the Assembly Government responsible for taking forward this commitment, about what such a proposal might contain. As a result, a consultation event for Llafur members will take place in Cardiff on 1 March 2008, jointly sponsored by Llafur and CyMAL. This will be the opportunity for Society members to discuss with the relevant Assembly Government officials their thoughts, and help shape what a policy on Welsh People's History should look like, and how it might be implemented. The opportunity to dialogue around policy development now made possible by the existence of the Welsh Assembly Government makes this, to some extent, a new departure – from looking at the

history of policy to the policy of history, so to speak. Equally, it is consistent with the work that we did in the early 1980s, led by Hywel Francis, looking at the then novel area of the relationship between heritage and history, as well as work taken forward by the Llafur Teachers Group on curriculum development. The Society's committee regards this consultation with CyMAL as important, and invites Llafur members who wish to participate to contact the Llafur Secretary, Siân Williams at [s.f.williams@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:s.f.williams@swansea.ac.uk), to confirm their attendance.

As mentioned in the homepage, we are now receiving requests by students to study the history of the Society. Hopefully, what they will find is that some things have remained consistent throughout our existence:

- relevant and exciting events free at the point of delivery or with a minimum charge
- a journal which is a standard bearer for the Society, as well as one of the most important outlets for the 'production' of history in Wales, with content that continues to reflect our 'traditional values', whilst also reflecting changing focus and interest
- and most importantly a committed membership who create an enjoyable atmosphere!

And if you are not, yet, a Llafur member, I hope that you will have read enough to convince you that we are worth joining!

---

## AGM

### Waterfront Museum, Swansea Saturday 3 November, 2007

Following a successful day school on Visual Culture in modern Wales Llafur's AGM took place. The progress of the society in the previous year was discussed and new officers were elected.

Steve Thompson made the decision to stand down as Secretary after many years in the role. He was thanked for his dedication and hard work. Siân Williams has taken over in this capacity and stood down as Treasurer. Stephanie Ward has become Treasurer.

The success of the recent volume on the Workers' Education Association published by Llafur and edited by executive committee member Joe England was noted. Copies of *Changing Lives: Workers' Education in Wales 1907-2007* are available to buy through the Llafur bookshop.

Neil Evans, one of the journal editors, noted in his report how Llafur members can look forward to another year of exciting journal publications.

Llafur's programme for 2008 was also discussed.

---

### FORTHCOMING LLAFUR EVENTS:

#### Consultation with CyMAL

Cardiff,  
1 March 2008

Llafur members are invited to attend a consultation with CyMAL to discuss thoughts, feelings and suggestions about the proposed Welsh people's history collection.

**Robert Owen and His Legacy**  
Gregynog Hall, Newtown  
14-17 August 2008

This conference marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Robert Owen. The event is going to be held in conjunction with the school of humanities at Swansea University.

---

**RECENT EVENTS:**

**Visualising the Valleys: Life, Work and Community**

**Waterfront Museum, Swansea**

**Saturday, 3 November 2007**

**Stephanie Ward**

In early November Llafur, in conjunction with the Josef Herman Foundation, held a successful day school on the visual culture of modern south Wales. The event was held in the newly opened Waterfront Museum in Swansea and the location provided an exciting setting for a day of thought-provoking presentations.

The day began with an opening address from the chair **Dai Smith**. Smith noted how it was exciting for Llafur to be involved in the event and he pointed out the European significance of many of those who have visualized Wales. Smith raised the point that Welsh society has not always appreciated visual culture and equally historians of Wales have not always appreciated art as visual evidence. It was felt that the approach of art historians is needed for a more subtle understanding of art as an historical source. Finally, Smith suggested that Llafur hold a day-school on photographs.

The first speaker was **Peter Wakelin** the Secretary of the Royal Commission of

Ancient Monuments. Wakelin presented a paper on the works of Joseph Herman and Francis Koppel which was accompanied by a visual display of their paintings. Wakelin began by noting how both Herman and Koppel would today be thought of as asylum-seekers as both were escaping the persecution of ethnic cleansing in their homelands. Herman came to Britain from Poland and Koppel from Nazi Germany. Wakelin noted the importance of the contribution immigrants make, in this case to art, and questioned the perceptions of immigrants in current society.

The work of both Herman and Koppel was contrasted and their importance to Welsh, and indeed European, art noted.

In the second strand of the day **Hywel Francis** and **Siân Williams** presented a paper on banners and their relevance to visual culture. Hywel began by noting his family's personal connection with Joseph Herman. He went on to speak about how banners were utilised by the miners in south Wales and why they were created. Although the greatest banner tradition may appear to have been in the 1950s, there were examples of banners before this. 1910-1914 was a great period of banner making, although few examples of banners before the 1950s now exist. Photographs were shown of the best examples of banners that are now kept in the South Wales Coalfield Collection.

Hywel argued that while the south Wales coalfield did not have the same reverence for banners as in Durham, they were used for a variety of purposes from the 1950s. Banners were displayed during strikes, anti-Thatcher demonstrations and anti-apartheid rallies. Some of the banners from the coalfield are now kept in Poland and Hywel spoke about his visit to see these. Hywel's gave an informative talk that was made particularly lively by his inclusion of humorous personal reminiscences.

Siân followed Hywel's presentation with a discussion of the work that the South Wales Miners' Library undertakes to preserve and make banners available to the public. The better preservation of banners has been made possible by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Siân noted that there are frequent requests to use the banners although she felt that they under utilised as a historical source. In order to make the banners more widely available, the Lottery Fund grant has been used to make replica banners.

To promote understanding of the banners, Siân has developed two exhibitions, one with banners from all over Wales (which was funded by CyMAL) and the second which concentrates on miners' banners. A number of learning resources to accompany the exhibitions have been created. Siân finished her talk by noting that the Miners' Library does not only collect banners made by the SWMF and the NUM. Friendly society banners, women's movement banners and banners for devolution are also held in the collection. Staff at the Miners' Library are currently trying to establish what other banners are held by people within south Wales.

A break for lunch took place after the morning's papers and participants were given the opportunity to explore the Waterfront Museum and Swansea marina.

The afternoon session began with a talk on Ernest Zobole by **Ceri Thomas**, son of Robert Thomas. Ceri Thomas has been heavily involved in the conservation of Zoble's work and has recently been awarded his doctorate

Thomas was the curator of an exhibition of Zobole's work at the University of Glamorgan from 2002-7. Zobole was the son of Italian immigrant parents and lived all of his life in the Rhondda Valleys. He

was part of the 'Rhondda Group', which was a loose gathering of young artists in the 1950s who travelled from the Rhondda to the art school in Cardiff on the train.

Thomas put together five exhibitions of Zobole's work at Glamorgan. The exhibitions drew upon a particular aspect of Zobole's paintings and contrasted an element or theme with contemporary art and culture. In the first exhibition, for example, Thomas initiated a project with Bodringallt Primary in Ystrad. Ystrad had a particular resonance with Zobole's work, often forming the setting for paintings, as this is where he spent most of his life. The children sought out the streets and places in Zobole's paintings and created their own animated film.

Thomas pointed out that little remains known of Zobole and his contemporaries. Peter Lord was the first to talk about many of the artists from the Rhondda Group and Thomas attempted to demonstrate the value of their work in his second exhibition. Thomas ended his talk rather poignantly by arguing that the rich cultural history that paintings provide are often kept hidden and deserve greater attention from historians.

In the final session of the day Wales' leading documentary and film maker **Colin Thomas** presented another aspect of Wales' visual culture. Before a screening of the Dylan Thomas-scripted documentary film *Wales – Green Mountains, Black Mountains* (1942) Thomas discussed the relevance of the piece.

Dylan Thomas scripted fourteen films in total and Colin noted that he actively sort work in the film industry. Thomas had worked with Donald Thomas of Strand Films in 1930s and they worked again on *Green Mountains, Black Mountains*. The film is seen as a piece of wartime propaganda but Colin argued that it also

shows that Dylan Thomas did have a political edge as the government initially tried to block the documentary being shown. It was the rage that Thomas expressed about social conditions in the 1930s in the accompanying poem that caused alarm. The film footage was not all original and many of the stills were from *To-Day We Live* which showed most clearly the effects of the depression in the valleys of south Wales. A lively discussion followed the screening of the film.

The day was a great success and thanks were expressed to both Steve Thompson and Joseph Herman members for organising the event. The mixture of members from Llafur, art historians and Josef Herman Foundation members ensured that lively debates took place after each of the sessions.

---

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS IN WELSH HISTORY:

Steven Thompson  
*Unemployment, Poverty and Health in Interwar South Wales*  
(University of Wales Press, 2007)

Matthew Cragoe & Chris Williams (eds.)  
*Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*  
(University of Wales Press, 2007)

Rhiannon Mason  
*Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and Its National Museums*  
(University of Wales Press, 2007)

Anne Borsay & Sara Knight  
*Medical Records for the South Wales Coalfield C. 1890-1948: An Annotated Guide to the South Wales Coalfield Collection*  
(University of Wales Press, 2007)

Jane Aaron & Ursula Mason (eds.)  
*The Very Salt of Life: Welsh Women's Political Writings from Chartism to Suffrage*  
(Honno, 2007)

Angela V. John  
*Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life*  
(Tempus, 2007)

Angela V. John & Revel Guest  
*Lady Charlotte Guest: An Extraordinary Life*  
(Tempus, 2007)

Angela V. John  
*War, Journalism and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century. The Life and Times of Henry W. Nevinson.*  
(I.B. Tauris, 2006)

Many titles relevant to Llafur members, including back copies of journals can be bought through the society's bookshop at Llafur events or by contacting Siân Williams. Full details appear on the website at [www.llafur.org](http://www.llafur.org).

---

