

Centre for Advanced Welsh
& Celtic Studies

- › Introduction to the Centre
- › Early History of the Centre
- › More about the Centre
- › Contact Us
- › Research Projects
- › Staff Pages
- › News & Events
- › Collaborations
- › Publications
- › Research Funding
- › Postgraduate Study
- › Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice

[Home](#) > [Home](#) > [Centre for Advanced Welsh & Celtic Studies](#) > Early History of the Centre

Early History of the Centre

 [Download as PDF](#) [Send to a friend](#) [Print this Page](#)

Address by Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos, on the occasion of the opening of the new building of the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 28 May 1993 (published in *Y Traethodydd*, Hydref 1993)

This delightful occasion today marks the end of an old story and, I trust, the start of a new one. In 1940 a School of Celtic Studies was founded as part of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, and this gave rise to aspirations for a similar School in Wales. When Dr Elwyn Davies joined the staff of the University of Wales Registry in 1945, as Secretary of the Council, the founding of such a School became a goal upon which he set his heart. At the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties he gained the collaboration of two great scholars, Professor Griffith John Williams of Cardiff and Professor Thomas Jones of Aberystwyth, and efforts continued throughout the fifties and early sixties to secure funding through the University's Board of Celtic Studies for this initiative. The increasing reputation of the Dublin School, and the fact that other Celtic nations were now establishing similar institutions, provided additional impetus to the campaign. Unfortunately, the efforts of the campaigners were not crowned with success at this time. Elwyn Davies moved to the Department of Education and Science in 1963, Griffith John Williams died the same year, and before long Thomas Jones was unfortunately also suffering increasing ill health; and so the campaign came to an end. In 1970 the Board of Celtic Studies formally decided not to take the matter any further.

From this time onwards I had the privilege of following the changing fortunes of the undertaking, firstly in Aberystwyth then later as Vice Chancellor. In the mid-seventies, the Professors in the School of Celtic Studies at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth (Sir Goronwy Daniel was Principal at the time) gained the College's permission to launch an appeal to commemorate that great author, Sir Thomas Parry-Williams, who died in 1975, and his renowned colleagues in the College's Departments of Welsh and Welsh History. The old dream was revived, because the aim was to use funds raised by the Appeal to set up a Centre for Welsh and Celtic Studies within the College. The Appeal was a success and the Centre came into being, albeit only with honorary – in other words, unpaid! – officers. The first Director was Professor J. E. Caerwyn Williams, who at the time was Professor of Irish in the College having been Professor of Welsh in Bangor, and the success of the endeavour from the very start can be attributed in large measure to his wise guidance and his exceptional international reputation as a Celtic scholar. In 1983, once again at the urging of the Professors of the School of Celtic Studies, the College, under the leadership of Professor Gareth Owen, submitted an application to the University Grants Committee for funds to employ in the Centre a staff of six – a Director, a Secretary, and four Research Fellows – to carry out research into major subjects in the fields of the language, literature and history of Wales and the other Celtic nations. Though the times were hard, as we all remember, the college was informed in 1984 that the application had been successful, and this was largely due to the intercession of Professor John Cannon from Newcastle and Professor Eric Stanley from Oxford.

With remarkable generosity, the College then transferred its carefully-nurtured 'baby' straight into the charge of the University! A constitution was established, six members of staff were appointed, including the first official Director, Dr R. Geraint Gruffydd, and the new institution within our University, now funded by the Grants Committee, opened its doors on 1 October 1985. Its first project – and a very difficult one – was the editing of the complete works of the Poets of the Welsh Princes from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and this task is very near completion. Other projects, supported by a combination of public and private funds, are currently either underway or being considered – projects on the social history of the Welsh language, the Welsh poetry of the later Middle

Ages and Welsh place names. The ultimate goal – approved by the Grants Committee in 1988 – is to have three research teams working simultaneously on the history, language and literature of Wales and the Celtic nations, and this goal is now close to being realised.

During its first eight years, the Centre enjoyed the generous hospitality of the institute that brought it into being, the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and successive Principals of that College have chaired the Centre's Management Committee – the current Principal, Professor Kenneth O. Morgan, is our gracious host this afternoon. However, in 1988 an application was made to the Grants Committee, through the Buildings Officer of the University College of Wales, for capital funding to erect a new building for the Centre on a site adjacent to the National Library of Wales, where the majority of the raw materials for its research are located. It seemed logical that the new building should also house, along with the Centre, the prestigious *Dictionary of the Welsh Language* Unit, which had previously been accommodated within the National Library for close to forty-five years, thereby facilitating the production of its great work – a masterpiece of lexicography – which is now close to completion. The Grants Committee very kindly allocated a grant of approximately £600,000, to which the University added close to £300,000 out of its own funds – a crucial decision. The resulting total was sufficient to meet the requirements that arose from erecting the new building so close to the National Library, which is of course a listed building. Both the Library and the College showed great generosity throughout the planning and building stage: both institutions gave the University a lease on land belonging to them, so that the building could be erected on this site. There were some initial planning difficulties, but these were overcome thanks to much goodwill on the part of Ceredigion District Council. Mr John G. Roberts, Head of the Project Office of the Welsh School of Architecture, was appointed as architect with Messrs Frank Galliers of Shrewsbury as the main contractors. I am sure you will agree with me that together they have erected a particularly splendid building, and I warmly congratulate them on this exceptional feat.

To close, I return to the first person I named at the start, Dr Elwyn Davies. The vision of a Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies for Wales never left him, and before his death he rejoiced in the fulfilment of this vision. After his death in 1986 it was announced that he had bequeathed to the Centre the residue of his estate, a sum of over half a million pounds. It is most appropriate, after I declare this building officially open, and after the Director's address, that we should move outside, where Professor David Davies, the nephew of Dr Elwyn Davies, will unveil an inscription to commemorate Dr Davies's generosity and to announce at the same time, in words carved as it were in granite, that the dream he cherished for so long has now been realised.



University of Wales Centre for Advanced
Welsh & Celtic Studies

National Library of Wales

Aberystwyth

Ceredigion

SY23 3HH

Tel. +44 1970 636543

[Enquiries](#) • [Vacancies](#) • [Press](#) • [Intranet](#) • [Webmail](#)

© Copyright 2014 The University of Wales unless otherwise stated

[Cookies on this Site](#) • [Disclaimer](#) • [Privacy](#) • [Freedom of Information](#) • [Accessibility Statement](#) • [Powered by Contensis](#)