

## **Gareth L. Howell Memorial**

Our Club members differ along many dimensions. Tenure forms one of those dimensions. Our longest-standing current member joined in 1961. Some members have family connections to earlier Club members, stretching back more than a generation. Other members however come to our town as their profession requires and join our Club as their interest and talent encourages, but then leave us as professional obligations change. We number Gareth Howell among the latter – a star crossing our firmament from 2006 until his return to Washington. Even from there he returned to give a paper and assumed associate membership only in 2014, thus leaving us three full length papers as his legacy.

Gareth was born in Rhiwbina, Wales. He trained as a lawyer and built his career with major international development organizations such as the International Labor Organization, the World Bank, the United Nations and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. This work took him to many countries. In the course of his work, he learned languages as he went, ending up speaking seven in total. From 1999 until his death this year, he lived in the United States, ultimately becoming an American citizen. He came to Cincinnati, where in 2005 he became the executive director of the World Affairs Council and the International Visitors' Council. It was in this capacity that I built my friendship with Gareth.

Despite this very global career, Gareth remained at heart a Welshman. He loved Welsh poetry, literature and history. As a Welsh magistrate he drafted early proposals for a Welsh Constitution, which finally arrived in 1999. He commented for the BBC in the Welsh language on matters American, including reporting on the US elections of 2008 and 2016. He owned a large collection of books in Welsh. I recall him proudly showing me a Welsh book published in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century - a book he found for sale on EBay.

This memorial will review how his Welsh heritage and studies shaped his papers for the Club. You couldn't miss it! His inaugural paper before the Club, A Memorable Honour, gave a tour d'horizon of Welsh history going back to the

fourth century. He also covered Welsh poetry and literature and the many Welsh connections to the United States and indeed to Cincinnati. Reading the paper one can't help but think that he was laying out the prospectus for his contributions to the Club's papers over coming years. Based on his erudition and variegated interests, he might have entertained and enlightened our members on many Welsh historical by-ways, connections, and characters. Let me quote just few items from this paper, without trying to read the Welsh poetry excerpts he included. Some of the most delicious quotes touch on the fraught relations between the "Saxons" (i.e. the English) against his "British," i.e. the Welsh. His Welsh wit truly sparkles in some of these passages.

- "In 1282 Edward I decided – like others since – to spread his redeeming values by force of arms, and defeated the Welsh monarch Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, naming his own infant son Prince of Wales, so that job was filled-by the English king's heir – as, in the view of many, it is to this day." I don't think Gareth numbered himself among the "many" on this question.
- After a review of Welsh nobles and statesmen who served in Westminster governments from Henry IV to Victoria, he notes, "Wales conquered England, as was foretold, which the English - to this day – still fail to grasp. The rest is History."
- "Among Wordsworth's friends, Southey, soon to be England's Poet Laureate, was moved, by the Welsh visionary Iolo Morgannwg, to write his poem 'Madoc.' ... It tells of pre-Columbian Welsh settlement in America, backed by tales of Welsh-speaking Indians. The tale was influential and ... known to Jefferson."
- "The social and political interface of England with Wales became so complex in the 17<sup>th</sup> century- that we Welsh had to invent America, to escape the prosaic, autocratic English view of God, poetry, liberty and the Common Weal. ... Plainly, this is a work in progress." Gareth sometimes argued that America should have been called "Madocia" in honor of the Welsh prince who landed in Alabama in 1170. But more on this momentarily.

- “Some say that the USA drew from Wales a perennial freshness, and an illuminated inspiration toward free expression and equality, grounded in a spiritually driven pursuit of happiness and perfection. Some say that the unbalancing drive – to covet and over-run the western land of others, and to use military hegemony to command scarce resources of fuel, slaves, gold and oil, a drive well-learned ... is the product of the Saxon English heritage. Yet, when I became an American last year, I was told that racial profiling is discouraged here and so – regretfully – I must for now eschew such beguiling enquiries.”

Gareth’s second paper, an opening meditation on physics and consciousness led to considering several philosophers, reburials of famous people, Tom Paine’s politics and the Courts of George III and George IV, where he finds space to quote a ditty from the time:

“And when from the Earth the last descended  
Thanks be to God, the Georges ended. “

The English monarchs just proved too tempting a target, even in passing.

He also can’t help quoting a visitor to Cincinnati in 1856, who reported,

“There was an admirable literary club, which met every week to converse and regale itself with squibs, recitations, cigars and Catawba wine. To it belonged young men who afterwards became eminent figures in the world.”

How could any of our Club's members, finding that quote while researching a paper, resist including it regardless of the overall topic?

Gareth’s third paper before us takes up the topic of the Welsh Prince Madoc, “who set sail in 1170 on the western ocean. By fortitude, and good fortune, and to his evident surprise, he discovered America. He made his ostensibly improbable landfall in Mobile Bay in what is now Alabama.” His paper traces the ebb and flow of the Madoc story across several hundred years of Welsh, English

and American history. The Welsh discovery of America in 1170 was very convenient for the English monarchs – it established that their claim on America predated similar Spanish claims. Seventeenth century explorers reported finding native tribes who spoke Welsh. Nineteenth century literary and antiquarian figures found passages supporting the story. Gareth traces this story down to books published recently, citing a 2004 book, “Footprints of the Welsh Indians.”

Gareth’s paper largely gives us a straightforward and even sympathetic recital of the Welsh discovery of America and the writings supporting it over this period of roughly eight hundred years. It is just too great a story to be treated with excessive skepticism, but Gareth leavens his paper with some mordant observations on the Welsh character:

- “Some say that the Welsh view of our history thrives on a lively blend of supposition, inspiration, and selective discernment of minimally distracting facts.”
- “All that remained was to adduce evidence and a credible framework of historical fact to demonstrate to a skeptical world Madoc’s self-evident enterprise and its aftermath. This was a challenge too good for my countrymen to resist.”
- “Being a Welsh mystery, the imagination of informants knew no bounds: new investigations and books appear to this day.”
- “Who can gainsay the numinous hinge of fact, metaphor and fantasy.”

In this paper Gareth gave us a very nice balance between a charming, ingenuous and very long-lived story yet with just a little touch of skeptical distance.

Finally, permit me a personal recollection. When Gareth first invited me to visit our Club, he explained the nature and workings of the Club, the papers, the pace of the evenings and so on. He added one description, however, which has remained with me. He said, “The Club reminds me of the House of Lords.” He said this with a disarming twinkle in his eye, which led me to think he meant this as a double-jointed comment, pointing out both the idea of a long tradition and the idea of eccentricity. Then he added “You will see a vista of red leather

seating, meet venerable members and learn long-standing traditions.” That description has always seemed a memorable, but also very apt, description of the Club he valued so much.

Richard I. Lauf

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