**SIR JOHN MEURIG THOMAS - MEMORIAL SERVICE – 13 November 2021**

It is not uncommon for people to recall some events in their lives that remain special. Such events were varied in their nature: some were personal and shared with only a few; some were experienced with several, even crowds; some were wholly musical as in concerts; some were composed entirely of words, as in dramas or sermons or orations; some combined music and words; some were happy; some were sad and solemn but not sombre.

My own most recent special event falls in the last two categories of this list. It happened on November 13th, 2021, just a few weeks ago. It was the Memorial Service for Professor Sir John Meurig Thomas held at Bethesda Chapel in Llangennech, Llanelli. Sir John died on the same date in 2020 in Cambridge where he had lived for many years, but COVID restrictions necessitated a delay in holding a memorial service in his ‘home patch’.

Bethesda holds a place of much significance in the life of Sir John; it was here that he first met Margaret, who was to become his wife and mother of his two daughters, Lisa and Naomi. It was here that they both attended services regularly and benefited greatly from the magnanimous ministry and illuminated preaching of the Reverend Maurice Loader.

What follows below is my attempt to convey an insight into the substance and ‘flavours’ of the items in the Order of Service. Our participation as members of the congregation was greatly facilitated by our having printed copies, with some information about contributors. There was no need of ‘intrusive’ introductions. Everything flowed calmly with simple style.

The four tributes were distinctive in that each dealt with a different aspect of Sir John’s life. My selections from what was spoken are but pointers to a richness that took my breath away when I first heard them. I have retained the form of address used by each presenter when referring to Sir John, thus we have, in sequence. ‘John’, ‘JMT’, ‘Dadi’ and ‘John’.

The two hymns are, with no disrespect, among the ‘Top of the Pops’. They attain this status, with full justification, because of the rich imagery of their words and their sensitive and rousing tunefulness.

All this is true. I was there!

Neville Evans (Cardiff)

December 2021

After opening remarks of welcome and guidance from the minister of Bethesda, the Reverend Llewelyn Picton Jones, the service took the following form.

**Service of Thanksgiving for the Life and Work of Professor Sir John Meurig Thomas**

**Hymn W.Rhys Nicholas** *Tydi a wnaeth y wyrth* **(Tune: Pantyfedwen)**

**Tribute The Reverend Dr. John Tudno Williams**

*It was through our children that we first became acquainted as families……..As we, their parents, came to know eachother better a friendship was established, which remained a very close one throughout the years………We harbour fond memories ……..One evening was an especially memorable one; it was when John had just been informed of his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society……..However, at the same time one was aware that Aberystwyth would not be able to retain John’s services for long after this…..*

*However, we experienced sad occasions as well: Margaret’s funeral was held in Little St. Mary’s Church, Cambridge……I conducted a Welsh service in the local crematorium…..*

*I should like to draw this tribute to a close by summarizing his virtues under four headings. In Welsh they all start with the letter ‘d’ – highly intelligent, industrious, cultured, possessing great humanity.*

*……he remained to the very end of his life the very same true friend, jovial and generous, that we had first met nearly fifty years ago. It was indeed an honour to have known him……*

**Music Schubert** *An die Musik* D547 **Lucy Gold and Naomi Thomas** (instrumental duet)

**Tribute Professor Kenneth Harris**

*Sir John Meurig Thomas was one of the most distinguished and influential scientists of his generation and a pioneer in the field of Solid - State Chemistry and Heterogeneous Catalysis. He made a truly significant impact in….. these fields…….as well as forging a very prominent role in the popularization of science….and inspiring many young scientists.*

*I had the privilege of studying for the PhD degree under Sir John’s supervision…..in Cambridge and ..in London…..I had the good fortune to maintain close scientific contact, collaboration and friendship with him for the following 33 years.*

*….Sir John spent the first 20 years of his academic career in Wales……His career was clearly on a rapidly rising trajectory…..the innovative research directions that he was advancing…..established his reputation as a world-leading scientist…..*

*I now take up the story in 1985 when I joined JMT (as he was always known in the scientific world) …in Cambridge. I felt exceptionally fortunate that I had such an erudite, enthusiastic, encouraging and supportive mentor……JMT’s effervescent enthusiasm for science was inspirational….*

*One of JMT’s most striking attributes was the way he worked with consummate efficiency. No second was ever wasted…*

*I was always very impressed by JMT’s egalitarian manner, and the way he treated everyone equally…he also cared deeply about every member of his research team…..one of his most special qualities was a tremendous loyalty to those who worked with him….*

*….JMT moved in 1986 to London as Director of the Royal Institution….JMT was ideally suited to this role, as it allowed him to continue to advance the frontiers of research…as well as to fulfil his passion for promoting public engagement in science……one aspect that was especially dear to him was that his appointment….allowed him to follow in the footsteps of his childhood scientific hero, Michael Faraday…..JMT’s admiration for Michael Faraday was truly unequivocal. He rejoiced in the fact that he could now carry out his research in the same laboratory where Michael Faraday had made all his monumental discoveries……..JMT could now work every day at the very same desk that Michael Faraday had used some 150 years earlier. Indeed, given JMT’s tremendously strong work ethic…..the brilliance of his scientific ideas…… his humility, it was clear that JMT shared many of the qualities that are well documented about Michael Faraday.*

*But let us also remember that a very important factor underlying all his achievements and successes was the wonderful support that he received from his family: Margaret, Lisa, Naomi and Jehane.*

*…JMT was a very prolific author….and an inspiring and dynamic lecturer…..a natural story-teller..*

*Everyone who ever interacted with Sir John Meurig Thomas must have been touched by his unique personality….he was the epitome of the true scientist and gentleman: profoundly erudite, infectiously enthusiastic, kind…wonderfully loyal and supportive……he is very sadly missed.*

**Reading W. H. Davies** *Leisure* **Jehane Ragai**

**Tribute Lisa Thomas**

*We are here today to remember and to give thanks for the life of Dadi – a long, happy, full and busy life. On the day he died, one year ago today, the last scientific paper with his name on it was published in Nature…… This latest work was presented in COP 26 last week by the team in Oxford.*

*In the…. months of lockdown he wrote, long-hand, the manuscript for ‘Albemarle Street, Portraits, Personalities and Presentations’ at the Royal Institution, recounting, as only he could, that brilliant history.*

*Dadi’s father …..told him that he didn’t want him to work underground……Dadi publicly expressed his debt to the Butler Act which gave him the chance for a different path, which…..he grasped with both hands.*

*Dadi taught us many things…..he was a charismatic and dynamic father, communicator…And he himself never stopped learning….He thoroughly enjoyed himself along the way…. loved connecting with those around him…. Gwyn Thomas the poet said that when listening to Dadi lecturing or speaking, ’you could not choose but to hear….he opened science onto a metaphysical level’…And he was a bit of a showman when the occasion called for it – the Royal Institution lecture theatre was the perfect platform for him.*

*And I do think of his life as an adventure…..it took him to pretty much anywhere…..and happily for us, it took us with him…..I spent a wonderful month with him in Italy, the summer after Mami died….I got to know the dry cleaners of various towns very well since the ice cream often somehow collided with his beloved University of Wales tie...…This enthusiasm for travel was quite something….There was not a minute to spare…The journeys were almost exclusively associated with his work, giving lectures and collaborating with other specialists from a variety of universities in several countries. His academic distinction was widely recognised, often culminating in an abundance of awards, honorary professorships and distinguished prizes. Throughout his life, Dadi displayed a constant, central conviction, namely, that there was always a higher goal, a higher aspiration. Perhaps this is best described by the Welsh word DYSGU, which traditionally has the two aspects of teaching and learning. Communicating was his motivation, sharing with others, so that he could both impart and learn. He had an unerring sense of right and wrong. A rock-solid presence.*

*But this is not to say that he didn’t know how to enjoy himself or relax……Great company at parties, fabulous storyteller and generous host….But in his private leisure time he was listening to music and he was informing himself…..Undoubtedly he could not have achieved what he did without our mother’s support…. throughout her illness, his love, strength and unfailing support kept her going…… Naomi and I are eternally grateful that Jehane did the same for him….*

*He had fun with my children. When Manon asked him at a young age whether he had been a political refugee or economic migrant when he left Aberystwyth for Cambridge there followed an amusing discussion.*

*…..Writing to people is what academics do….That habit started in this building….this is ..where he first met Mami….they used to sit up there in the balcony and listen to Mr. Loader. Mami a theology student, serene, serious minded and beautiful. Dadi wanted to engage…..He would write to ministers after their sermons, to ask why, what and how….*

*So Dadi, today we remember you by your own words, given as advice to students…..’Be bold and adventurous without being reckless…..Be positive and enthusiastic and never cease to lose your intellectual curiosity’.*

**Reading Dylan Thomas** *Do not go gently into that good night* **Manon Graham**

**Music J. S. Bach/Gounod** *Ave Maria* **Lucy Gould and Naomi Thomas**

**Tribute Professor Prys Morgan**

*For me as a historian there is importance in naming…..Sir John Meurig Thomas was honoured in 1995 by geochemists naming a new mineral Meurigite…Fame through a rock, but the rock important to us today is the rock from which John was hewn……which he never forgot.*

*John always expressed gratitude to his native heath…..his father realized that such was the profound Welshness of the district that John would never succeed in mastering English….and made him recite passages from the dog breeders’ journal Our Dogs…..but master English he did….John was also self- educated, like his father, reading the Daily Worker in the barber’s shop with science articles..*

*John always spoke appreciatively of his education at University of Wales, Swansea….under the influence of (Principal) J. S. Fulton, a believer in the linking of the ‘Two Cultures’…..*

*John always spoke appreciatively of the cultural influence of the National Eisteddfod, of which he was an honorary Bard……and a stalwart of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion in London…I know by personal experience how enthusiastic John was in the early years of this century to help found The Learned Society of Wales…..to recreate in Wales something of the intellectual market place he had known in the Royal Institution in London.*

*….I wish to sum up by quoting two lines on a marble plaque in Bethlehem Aire Street Chapel, Splott, Cardiff, from a Welsh poem to a minister there in the 1930s. I translate, ‘Into the room he Summer brings, while making near the distant things’. I feel that this sums up the essence of what John has meant to me and, I feel sure, to all of us Welsh people.*

**Prayer Reverend Llewelyn Picton Jones**

**Hymn William Williams** *Tyred Iesu i’r anialwch***(Tune: Blaenwern)**

**Benediction Reverend Dr. John Tudno Williams**

At the end of the Order of Service is printed a poem in Welsh by Gwyn Thomas, who was on the staff of the Department of Welsh at Bangor when Sir John was in the Department of Chemistry. The poem has the title John Meurig. It opens (in free translation*), ‘ From time to time, without doubt, from* *somewhere comes to the darkness of mankind a spark to bring light….’ . T*he poem closes, ‘ *John Meurig,* *you are one of the few’.*

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In addition to the Order of Service each member of the congregation was given a booklet with the title **A Selection of his Favourite Poetry.** On the front cover are the words of William Blake (The Auguries of Innocence)

To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

And Eternity in an hour.

The Selection carries a moving introduction by Jehane Ragai Thomas.

The opening paragraph is,

***Those of you who were close to John may agree that part of what made him so special was his lively sensitivity and essential humanity – not immediately expected from a person with such pronounced scientific leanings.***

The closing paragraph is,

***We hope you enjoy going through this small pamphlet we have put together with some of John’s favourite poems. His imaginative spontaneity, romantic optimism and search for truth about life and nature are only some of the gifts that will always keep us warm.***

The Selection contains examples, Welsh and English, in whole and in part, of poems by Dylan Thomas, W.H.Auden, R.Williams Parry, T.Gwynn Jones, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Rudyard Kipling, George Herbert, William Blake (in translation by D. Geraint Lewis), William Wordsworth, William Shakespeare. Robert Graves, Emily Dickinson, Albert Cynan Evans-Jones, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, John Ceiriog Hughes, R.S.Thomas, The Bible(Psalm 8).