

AN EXTRACT from

"LAST LEAVES OF A CIVILIAN'S JOURNAL"

written in March, 1940 and which contains a mixture of reportage and reminiscence.

Then boarding school. I was eleven and it was September. Mother took me to school by train. She bought a single for me, a return for herself. My father had painted my name in white on an old tin trunk. I had won a scholarship but there wasn't any money to buy a new fibre cabin trunk.

We walked from the sleepy station to the old century town; its grey somolent houses and shops with bottle glass windows made me hold her hand closer, so indifferent did they seem. The road smelt of petrol; cars went by like wasps. We went into the school tailors to buy a cap. The roof was leaking and we waited in the narrow musty room while the tailor fetched a step ladder and the water dripped into a zinc bath he had placed on the rotting floorboards under the leak. Mother thought the caps were poor and expensive, but I loved the feel of it on my head. Then we took a bus into the country to a friend's house. After lunch I took the three-year old baby for a walk while the grown ups talked over coffee. We went through a farm-yard into a barn. A tiny mouse scuttled into the hay. I shouted to the tiny boy, "There's a mouse." He didn't seem to understand. "A mouse," I said, shaking him. "Don't you know? I saw a mouse, There in that corner. He ran across the floor." The little boy refused to be electrified. I could have cuffed his head, I was so disappointed. I have just remembered that mouse. It has hidden for thirteen years. At last perhaps I will find someone to share the thrill.

At the door of the Headmaster's study mother was torn from me. I can remember the hurt of it. Then I was immediately led through the dining hall, a long bare room with washed trestle tables and innumerable photographs of football teams on its brown-distempred walls, and with a click of the latch thrust into the schoolroom. "Here's another of the little bastards," a big boy shouted. "What's your bloody name, son?" said another, twisting my ear. I was terribly, desperately shocked. Something burst inside me and my breath tugged at my trachea. They swore. Then another new kid came into the schoolroom. I knew him. He was from home. I waited for him to go through the ceremony of introduction. When I got a chance I went up to him, tugged his sleeve, and said with a moist nervous welcome, "'Hallo, David.'" "Hallo," he said jauntily. "You got here first, eh?" He rubbed his ear. "Those buggers nearly pulled my bloody ear off," he said resentfully. I felt utterly, utterly betrayed. Two days later a couple of fifth form bullies made me fight a new kid who was called dimple. We fought in the changing room, without gloves. We were both terrified. We hurt each other with our small fists, stab, stab, stab, breathless with fear of each other and of the shouting boys who surrounded us and egged us on. They laid bets on us, as in the University I have seen students betting each other over the seduction of their landlady's sixteen-year-old maid. I got Dimple's

head under my arm. We were bending over the washbasin and I saw my chance. I hit him on the temple and his head went thud against the spoke of the washtap. I did it three times. "Alright" he sobbed. "I give in." He was bruised and bleeding. So was I. His eye was swollen up. Mine wasn't. I just felt sick and blind. "I beat the bugger," I said. "I beat the bugger." I was lifted onto the shoulders of two big boys and carried down the corridor. I was sick over their trousers and waistcoats.

ALUN LEWIS  
A Miscellany of his writings

edited by  
John Pikoulis.

Added note by CHS (anon):

**Alun Lewis (1915 – 1944) was regarded by many as Britain's finest World War II poet.**

**Born in Cwmavon, near Aberdare, his father was a schoolteacher and his three brothers miners. He was a boarder at Cowbridge Grammar School, then went to university in Aberystwyth and Manchester, marrying in 1941.**

**Alun Lewis joined the army in 1940, though a pacifist, and was sent to India with the South Wales Borderers. He died in Burma on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1944.**



Alun Lewis in 1941 before receiving his commission.

## ALUN LEWIS

### Chronology

- 1915 Alun Lewis born, 1st July, at Cwmaman, near Aberdare, Glamorgan. His father, a schoolteacher, became Director of Education for Aberdare in 1938; his mother, the daughter of a Welsh Unitarian Minister.
- 1926 Cowbridge Grammar School. Homesick and unhappy at first, he settles there as a boarder and earns a reputation as a keen sportsman, a very able pupil academically and a writer of great promise.
- 1932 University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. He enters fully into the student life, playing hockey for the college, attending dances and social functions, playing bridge, swimming, contributing, chiefly stories, to the college magazine, *The Dragon*.
- 1935 First Class Honours in History. He proceeds to Manchester University to research on medieval church history. Though Manchester and his topic are equally irksome to him, he perseveres. He contributes short stories to *The Serpent*, the magazine of Owen's College.
- 1937 His research complete, he considers future employment—journalism, librarianship, the civil service—all for one reason or another rejected. His professor at Manchester gives him the opportunity of attending an International Peace Conference at Pontigny, in northern France. The six weeks he spends there are among the happiest of his life. He is a pacifist by conviction. In September he returns to U.C. Aberystwyth for the Teacher Training course; he meets Richard Mills and begins a lifelong friendship. Poems published in *The Observer* and *Time and Tide*.
- 1938 In the summer, teacher training over, he goes on a walking tour in Normandy with Richard Mills. But teaching posts are difficult to find. He joins the *Aberdare Leader* hoping to make a career in journalism; in October reads some of his poems from the BBC studio in Cardiff. November—takes a temporary appointment at the Lewis Boys' School, Pengam and quickly establishes himself as a gifted and energetic teacher.
- 1939 Lewis meets Gweno Ellis who teaches German at Mountain Ash G.S.; they fall in love and become engaged. His temporary stay at Pengam has extended to a full year, and in November the appointment is made permanent. Constable, the London publishers, make an encouraging response to a collection of poems he has sent. But the outbreak of war has increased the tension he feels as a pacifist. He begins writing a novel—which is never finished.
- 1940 He resigns from his post at Pengam, determined to enlist rather than await call-up. He joins the Royal Engineers on impulse and reports to the depot at Longmoor, Hants. After a painful period of adjustment to army routine, he begins writing once more.
- 1941 His attempt to transfer to the Education Corps proving unsuccessful, he applies for a commission in the infantry. His early infantry training is at Gloucester. Alun and Gweno marry in Gloucester early in July; the weekend over, Gweno returns to her teaching and he goes to the Officer Cadet Training Unit at Heynsham Towers, Morecambe. He signs a contract with Allen & Unwin for his first book of poems. His story 'They Came' wins the *O'Brien Short Story Award*. With Brenda Chamberlain and John Petts he plans the 'Caseg Broadsheets'. He begins correspondence with Robert Graves and Keidrych Rhys. Posted to the 6th Battalion South Wales Borderers at Woodbridge, Suffolk, he finds the

- officer's life 'somehow immoral and ludicrous', but is happier in contact with the men of his platoon—most of them from South Wales.
- 1942 In March, *Raiders' Dawn* is published, sells out and is quickly reprinted. Lewis is stationed on the Suffolk coast, part of the contingent guarding a radio location unit. A period of intensive battle-training in Suffolk is followed by a conversion course at Bovington, Dorset, to mechanise the S.W.B's. 'Corfe Castle' and the short story 'Dusty Hermitage' date from this period. *The Last Inspection* published, all but five of the twenty-three stories having been written during his time in the army. November—the battalion embarks from Liverpool for service overseas. Lewis is active throughout the voyage as Education and Entertainments Officer. At Christmas they disembark at Bombay and are eventually settled under canvas at Nira, near Poona.
- 1943 Early in the year he spends six weeks in hospital at Poona after breaking his jaw playing football and then contracting dysentery. While there he writes 'Ward "O" 3b', one of his finest short stories. A period of intense creative activity follows when he is sent with a detachment into the Mahratta Hills. The battalion reverts to infantry and is assembled for jungle training in the coastal swamps at Juhu, near Bombay. Out of his experience here comes 'The Orange Grove'. In August he is sent on an Intelligence course to Karachi and is given an opportunity of promotion to staff officer. It offers relative safety, but he refuses it and returns to his battalion. December—two days leave with his brother Glyn in Poona, and out of it 'The Reunion', his last story.
- 1944 In January, some fifty poems sent to Robert Graves for his appraisal are returned via Gweno and Lewis begins revising them ready for publication. He selects for the collection the ironic title 'Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets'. He decides he will write no more 'till the foulest day is behind me'. At the end of February the S.W.B's travel via Calcutta to Chittagong to be added to the 'Arakan defences. Lewis is granted permission to join his company in a forward position where they are already in contact with the enemy. March 5th Alun Lewis dies of wounds received in a revolver accident.
- 1945 *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets* published.
- 1948 *In the Green Tree* (uncollected short stories) published.
- 1966 *Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose* published.

## *The Young Historian: Some Letters from Alun Lewis*

Reginald Treharne was born of Welsh parents at Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire, in 1901. After a brilliant academic career as a mediaevalist he was appointed Professor of History at University College, Aberystwyth, before his twenty-ninth birthday and proceeded to organise his department along those closely tutorial lines which he himself had found so valuable in his own university experience. To record this is no mere laudatory and posthumous digression: it is clear from the letters which follow that he had made a point of 'caring' about his students and what happened to them afterwards in a way that greatly increased numbers have made impossible at present to professors of any other than 'minority subjects.'

Into the Department of History, in the third year of his suzerainty, came the freshman Alun Lewis, unwilling to wait the extra year that might have taken him to Jesus College, Oxford, and determined to use without delay the Exhibition that he had won from the Governors of Cowbridge Grammar School. Lewis's letters to Professor Treharne begin in the summer vacation of 1935. Like his mentor, he had specialised in the mediaeval period and obtained first class honours. That the letters were all carefully preserved by the Professor may have been a matter of habit only: it may indicate his personal regard for Lewis, his recognition of his academic distinction, or his early perception that the young man possessed other powers unusual in a historian. The day is past when we may ask.

For Professor Treharne died in July 1967, a little less than three months before he was due to retire after the completion of thirty-seven years' service at Aberystwyth. John Stuart Williams, whose critical articles on the work of Alun Lewis have appeared in previous issues of this Review, wrote to the Professor in 1964 before his departure on a visit to New Zealand, asking for letters or information. After his return the Professor responded, although ailing, by sending as a gift the letters now printed—which we owe to the courtesy of John Stuart Williams.

In publishing them we do not seek to over-estimate their importance. In the first place, they are formal, or semi-formal, letters, written before a time when it was deemed possible or even desirable for students to be on christian-name terms with their teachers and open their hearts to them. Only in the last two do we see Alun Lewis beginning to put an independent and possibly contradictory view, and then only on the basis of his own experience in teaching. There is nothing extraordinary about this: it does not argue servility or late development or undue



reserve on Lewis's part. The young were not expected then to pronounce until they had experience from which to pronounce, and Alun Lewis's tone reveals no more than a courteous acceptance of a convention to which, no doubt, he felt the more bound by gratitude and respect.

Nor do the letters add much in the way of detail to the biographical time-scheme.<sup>1</sup> The novel which Lewis was in such haste to finish before he was called up was never published. It was a novel of the coalmining life in Wales and he frequently went down from Aberdare to a cottage above Port Eynon in Gower which he had rented in order to work at it. When in his letter of 21 April, 1939, he promised to take his revenge by going to Gower he was hinting at, though not describing, his 'other life' as a writer. The paucity of the references to his writing does indeed help us to fix the contribution made by these letters. To underline the obvious, we may point out that they were written by a young man who had been trained as a historian to his former history professor. In other words, they stressed the academic, the subject they had in common, the pursuance or non-pursuance of advancement for a man with a history degree, and, ultimately, the almost accidental pleasure of teaching. This last is particularly important. What Alun Lewis wrote in his letter of 1 December, 1939—

I like teaching—I think most people start with apprehensions and find themselves pleasantly surprised. I get on very well with boys—play rugby and join in their Debates and so on.

—reinforces a point made by Ian Hamilton in his *Introduction to Alun Lewis: Selected Poetry and Prose*, published in 1966. Mr. Hamilton drew attention to the fact that those who had known Lewis at school remembered him not for 'his literariness, but his sporting prowess, his academic dependability, his good 'mixing.' This was not a sign of duplicity or schizophrenia; undoubtedly his public personality embodied those traits most acceptable to the society in which he found himself, but behind it something else was developing, a tenderer and at the same time more demanding concern which would not permit him, howsoever adaptable, to stop at the point at which he had made an overt contribution to his community. The sign of this development is to be found in a paragraph from a short obituary written by Professor Treharne in 1944 for the *Bulletin of the History Society* at Aberystwyth:

His work had not the 'civil service' quality of equal interest and achievement in all directions, and he enjoyed people, character, and the interplay of personalities and of tendencies more than some of the impersonal sides of the subject; but his interest was so deep as

<sup>1</sup> It is worth pointing out that an important gap may well be filled shortly by the publication by the Enitharmon Press (22 Huntingdon Road, East Finchley, London, N.2) of *Alun Lewis and The Making of the Caseq Broadsheets* by Brenda Chamberlain.

to be real sympathy and feeling, rising sometimes to a penetrating insight not common at this stage.

A man with this quality would make a good teacher, provided he were not in some way weak and laughable. This was where the rugger and the debates came in.

If these letters afford any corrective to Ian Hamilton's biography it is perhaps in underlining the seriousness with which Lewis set about seeking an academic career and in suggesting that his *writer* seeking an escape from a Wales 'a long way from the world' is an aspect of the man that one would expect in a correspondence with Jean Gilbert, a historian whom he met at the Pontigny conference so evocatively described in his letter of 21 June, 1937. Like most tractable beings, Alun Lewis wrote to his correspondents from that part of himself that offered common ground: to a Frenchman he enlarged upon an 'international' attitude: to Professor Treharne he reverted not infrequently to his nostalgia for 'Aber' and represented himself as considering a career in journalism or the civil service only because of the extreme difficulty of finding a history post in university or school.

And this last is something which social historians of the future may well need to record. Those of Alun Lewis's age and older remember only too well how tragically different from the present nonchalance and ease were the opportunities of those seeking entry to any kind of teaching before the Second World War. It may seem extraordinary now to young men who can command a grant for postgraduate research after any kind of upper second and can treat vacancies in schools in the most cavalier fashion that a man with a *first* of the quality of Alun Lewis's should have had to be lucky initially to get the Pickles at Manchester, then to be warned of the virtual impossibility of obtaining a university post, and finally to languish at home, fully trained, unwanted in any school for several months, only to slip in by the merest good fortune to The Lewis School, Pengam, in the December when the incumbent there fell ill. Extraordinary to the youngest generation of teachers, yes, but well vouched for by all those with over thirty years' experience. It is well to remember that Alun Lewis, seeking employment when he did and after no less than six years' university training, was *fortunate* that he had not, like some of his graduate contemporaries, to find his first fulfilment as a small arms instructor or an officer cadet. He was fortunate most of all as a poet. Had he seen war as an embracing significance in a careless world he could hardly have entered it ready in sensibility for the kind of death that tenderness could earn.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
22-6-35

Dear Professor Treharne,

Thank you very much for your more than encouraging letter and your testimonial. They must be a hard hearted Court of Governors who can refrain from throwing all the wealth of Florence and Pisa at me after reading it. I think it's just as well I've grown up enough to stop things going to my head, for I might be treading the streets now as one who has a great mission if I took to heart all the adulation and ullulation [sic] of fond aunts and little columns in such journals as the Cambrian News and the Aberdare Leader. And my landlord and his good wife on Thursday were as proud as peacocks, for my codigger Germanacos got a first as well and the old people are firmly convinced our success is due to the large quantities of rice pudding we consumed under their observation!

I saw Mrs. Treharne before the ceremony, but I failed to find her afterwards when I had got hold of Mother and Dad. Please apologise to her for my poor eyesight. I realise now why you preferred visiting London to taking part in the Degree ceremony—it's not exactly a bright affair, is it? But I enjoyed the day very much. I met so many friends for probably the last time that 'enjoying' isn't quite the word, either. Still, the old order always changeth, doesn't it? And it's distinctly unfashionable to grow maudlin nowadays.

Sanders<sup>1</sup> and Frank Lewis<sup>2</sup> have got feathers enough in their caps now, haven't they? I think Sanders especially deserves a day at the seaside.

I haven't written to Professor Jacob as yet. I'd rather see you again before I write to him. I'm still hankering after something more definitely social and economic as a subject for my thesis. The Forests was a lucky choice for my B.A. and I hope I strike oil a second time. I don't want to go on with the Forests, for I think I'd become somewhat one-sided about general History if I continued the same subject. I've spent one or two evenings right up on the whinberry fields on the mountains thinking the matter over but I haven't got hold of anything concrete yet. At the back of my mind all the time is an unhistorical ulterior motive—I want some time in the future to write—novels, poems, historical or not historical—but the chief impulse is to create something. The more my mind thaws after the gruelling it had last term, the

<sup>1</sup> I. J. Sanders, now and for long a member of the Dept. of History at Aberystwyth. This reference is probably to his achievement at Jesus College, Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> Once of Aberystwyth: at Oriol College, Oxford, in 1935.

stronger the urge I feel. It won't interfere with my M.A. work, for I must first find the truth—or get within striking distance of it—about the past and about the present, though I fear that's an over-ambitious programme.

Could you therefore meet me some time during August? I am spending August (from July 27th to August 24th) at Penbryn, a seaside village about 30 miles down the coast, and I can get to Aber and back in a day from there much more cheaply than I could from here. So I would be best suited if you could arrange an interview during the above named dates. Our address there is

The Mill,  
Penbryn,  
Sarnau,  
Henllan,  
Cards.

I am, by the way, not too proud to learn. During the last fortnight I've mastered two new accomplishments—(i) to drive a car and (ii) to poach pheasants in the woods and preserves of noble lords and ladies in the Vale of Glamorgan under the tuition of my History master at School and his dog. And good fun it is.

I haven't heard anything from Cowbridge as yet. I expect the Governors are meeting sometime this week. I hope I'll get the Exhibition renewed for this year but the Head told me I wouldn't get it renewed for a second year. Sufficient unto the Day!

Please give my best wishes to Mrs. Treharne and the little lady who ran off to show me her doll last time I met her,

Yours sincerely,  
Alun Lewis.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,

9-7-35

Dear Professor,

I expect you are already acquainted with my good fortune in the Manchester Studentship, for I don't think I'm wrong in blaming you for my success! Thank you very much.

I have accepted it and have also extracted almost-a-promise from my School Headmaster for a renewal of my School Leaving Exhibition. I think a testimonial from you would clinch matters. The Governors of the School are meeting within the next few days and, if your patience is not over tried already, I would be extremely grateful if you could send a testimonial either to me or direct to R. Williams, M.C., M.A.

The Grammar School,  
Cowbridge,  
Nr. Cardiff.



I was also offered [sic] a Normal for next Session in Aber. I feel very reluctant to turn it down for I'm really very happy in Aber and I was looking forward to editing the Dragon during the coming session. Still, I suppose it would be foolish to go back on such a pretext.

I'm having a lovely lazy sunbrowning rest now. I've completely forgotten the mental stress and strain and biting of nails of last term and concentrate instead upon swallow dives from overhanging trees and river banks up in some of the wonderful river valleys which the Beacons hide so jealously. I hope you too are enjoying the sun,

Yours sincerely,

Alun Lewis.

On the fourth side of the folded quarto sheet of writing paper, in the hand of Professor Treharne, the following:

Mr. Alun Lewis, B.A., of Aberdare, a former pupil of Cowbridge Grammar School, who obtained a first class Honours degree in History in the June examinations at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, has been awarded the Harry Thornton Pickles Postgraduate Studentship in History at the University of Manchester. The Studentship is tenable for two years and Mr. Lewis will read for the degree of M.A. on a topic of Medieval History.

(as from the University, Manchester.)

205 Woodstock Road,  
Oxford.

July 25, 1935.

My dear Treharne,

I expect that by now Alun Lewis has heard from the Registrar at Manchester that he has been awarded the Pickles. I thought that he was well worth experimenting with, and I liked the work in his thesis.

I do not feel certain about the subject selected. I want to talk it over with Cheney before seeing Lewis: the difficulty may lie in the source material: I am not clear how much is at Rome, if any; and it may be difficult to get Lewis out there. But we will go into these questions carefully.

Yours very sincerely,

E. F. Jacob.

ALUN LEWIS

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
[no date]

Dear Professor Treharne,

I enclose for your scrutiny Professor Jacob's letter. He seems to have decided fairly explicitly the subject of my work for the next two years.

In my letter to him I offered [sic] two suggestions (i) A social-economic inquiry into the baronial revolt, the division of wealth, power and class in the civil disputes, and the economic effects of the war on internal and possibly foreign trade (ii) The Hemingford-Curia intrigues which we touched upon in Shirley last term.

Professor Jacob appears to have dismissed suggestion (i) without any comment, though I would like him to have discussed it and its rejection in his letter. Suggestion (ii) does not seem a very watertight business, compared with the Ottobono affair. In view of Professor Jacob's opinion, and the connection between Ottobono and the Papacy—a connexion which might tell in my favour with regard to the Rome scholarship at some future date, do you consider it best that I settle on Ottobono? I know absolutely nothing about him and if I had possessed a key to your room I'd have gone up to Aber from Cardigan during the last fortnight to see what the gentleman looked like. I suppose the Cambridge Medieval is the most likely authority for getting some rough idea as to the lie of the land. Unfortunately Aberdare is deplorably devoid of such erudite works!

I shall not reply to Professor Jacob till I hear from you.

I trust your holiday is as pleasant as mine was—I hope to sail by cargo boat for France this week.

Yours sincerely,

Alun Lewis.

PS I presume Prof Jacob means M.A. not B.A. on page 2. A further point of importance:—I got £35 as compared with the original £45 Exhibition from Cowbridge, plus a message of congratulations from the Governors!

AL

PS. Do you know of any sources for Ottobono's relations with John Mansel over the Sicilian business apart from Shirley, Potthast and the Registers of the Popes?

46 Dover St  
Oxford Rd  
Manchester  
[no date]

\*Dear Professor,

Herewith a long-postponed epistle from one drawing out his days

far from his native land. In other words I'm finding it a terribly difficult task to get to like Manchester. It's so entirely different from anything I've met with in the past. The people are very kind, particularly Mr. Cheney, who has already given me several more than pleasant evenings among books and art and music. But the sudden jolt of finding oneself in the midst of a grimy city, with none of the woods and streams and hills which have become an integral part of me, and the loneliness of a strange place and strange faces is not a pleasant shock. Moreover I got a front tooth knocked out in hockey and that has made me keep to myself. I've been feeling very rebellious—not from obstinacy at not wanting to leave all the old things so much as from not expecting to find life so hard; I suppose I'll adapt myself to circumstances in time. But more materially, there are several very difficult problems ahead of me.

Firstly, my work doesn't look promising, I've been working very hard and conscientiously, partly to overcome the feeling of loneliness, partly because I'm terribly eager to get a job. It's an economic necessity, for the expense of an M.A. course appears likely to exceed my calculations. I'll have to spend some time in London, and also in Oxford, and as you know, I've got no surplus money to rely on. Then at the end of my 2 years course, I very much fear that I'll be left high and dry. Mr. Cheney tells me very emphatically that there's small chance of getting an academic post. The only alternative appears to be a year's training, yet in that year my younger brother goes to London University and it is imperative that I cause my people no extra expense. I'm seriously considering applying for a Normal grant for Aber<sup>3</sup> for the coming session. It seems a silly thing to do, but beggars can not always be choosers. Could you help me with any suggestions?

My actual work looks rather ominous at the moment. First of all, I've got several German books to read and I find the language no easy thing to master. One of these books is a biography of Ottobono, published in 1915. Now all the bishops' registers etc that have appeared since that date, together with the work which you and Professor Jacob have done on the political side—all of which are naturally not included in the German's bibliography, do not appear to have anything to add concerning the activities of Ottobono. The Registers of the bishops say little. The BM Additional MSS and the Historical MSS Commission are equally sterile. Lunt has dealt with his financial policy. Yet I must find something which can illumine the work which Ottobono obviously did in establishing the Dictum, in making peace between Henry III and Llewelyn in September 1267, and also in Scotland and Ireland. And there is precious little material surviving concerning the ecclesiastical side of his work, a fact which Mr Cheney also realises.

<sup>3</sup> That is, a grant to cover the Diploma of Education course at University College.

ALUN LEWIS

I think that perhaps J. Roderick can help me on the Welsh side, and I would be very grateful if you could give me his address. He may have some suggestions which will put me on to new sources, as a result of his MA. work. As it is I am somewhat at a standstill.

I hear all about life at Aber and I wish I was still there. This life is a contrast in every way and the break is even greater after the summer vac and a fortnight in Paris—where, incidentally, I bumped into Professor Barbier!<sup>4</sup>

Give my kindest regards to Mrs Treharne and Mr Herbert and Mr. Johnston.

Yours very sincerely,  
Alun Lewis.

The University,  
Manchester.  
November 12th  
1935.

My dear Treharne,

Many thanks for the return of the report. I have Alun Lewis' "Forest" thesis and will return it to you tomorrow. (It is in my rooms at Rusholme.) I am glad to say that Lewis has just done me an excellent piece of work, and I think that he has overcome his early fears of the unknown. The other researchers have cheered him up considerably.

Yours ever,  
E. F. Jacob.

The University of Manchester  
Manchester, 13.  
March 5th, 1937.

My dear Treharne,

I am very sorry that I have not returned this thesis by Alun Lewis earlier. I send it now.

I have before me the rough draft of his M.A. At present it is a trifle lacking in form, and there are, of course, a number of points to be reconsidered. But it shows that he has thrown himself wholeheartedly into the work here, and I have great confidence in him. His development has given us a good deal of pleasure.

With my kindest regards to Mrs. Treharne, and best wishes for your Revision Course later on,

Yours very sincerely,  
E. F. Jacob.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably Paul Barbier fils (Emil Ddu o Llydaw), author of *The Age of Owain Gwynedd* (published in 1908, when he was 23) and son of Professor Paul Barbier of the University of Wales.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
April 15th [1937]

Dear Professor Treharne,

I received a letter this morning from the Registrar at Aberystwyth informing me that I was ineligible for the Civil Service Scholarship. He did not state the grounds for this decision and I have written to him to ask him why I am disqualified. Howbeit, it seems as though that possibility has ceased to exist.

That leaves me with the two alternatives of a Normal Grant and a Fellowship. I don't know whether I stand much chance of the latter and it seems to me that my chief hope lies in the former. It might be possible to work for the Civil Service during my Training Year, if I can get Professor Chapple's permission, but that can be left alone until I make sure of admission to the Department.

I have also been making tentative inquiries concerning a course in Librarianship at London University. They offer an exhibition of £40, which would all go to paying fees and I would have to borrow £100 even if I got the exhibition. I shall have a chat with Dr Tyson and Mr Frank Taylor when I return to Manchester next week. I don't know what sort of a chance I stand for the Exhibition. They give preference to people who have already trained in a Library. If I decide to apply for it, would you be so kind as to stand as a Referee for me?

I am going back to Manchester on Monday to correct my thesis. After submitting it on the 30th, I am going as a 'young male historian' to a conference at Pontigny, an invitation to attend which has come to me via Professor Jacob. It's a six weeks' course so that I want to get my applications to Fellowship and Librarianship Exhibition settled before I leave. If you could let me know whether you approve of my policy as soon as possible I would be very grateful.

My address from the 19th to the 31st is 45, High St C on M<sup>5</sup> Manchester. From May 1st to the second week in June it will, I hope by [sic] Abbaye de Pontigny, Yonne, France. I've been very lucky to get this opportunity but I wish the future was a little less hazy!

Please give my regards to Mrs. Treharne.

Yours sincerely,  
Alun Lewis.

<sup>5</sup> Chorlton-on-Medlock.

ALUN LEWIS

45, High St.  
C on M.  
Manchester  
May 4th 1937

Dear Professor Treharne,

I was very glad to hear from you and I would like to put on record my appreciation of your sympathy and interest in my somewhat tangled political skein. Since you wrote there have been additional complications and denouements and I find it rather hard to keep up with developments!

Dr Tyson warned me off Librarianship. The Guardian informed me that they are unlikely to have any vacancies on their staff, and so could not give me a trial. Professor Jacob then urged me to reconsider my decision about not sitting the C.S. exam this year. Briefly, I decided to make a grand assault on the Commissioners' castle and without more ado began reading history and English. Contemporaneously I was correcting the typescript of my thesis and generally finding 24 hours absurdly inadequate for one day.

But all this was unfortunately blown to pieces when I discovered last Friday that the closing date for applications was April 10th, not, as I thought, May 8th. It's a misunderstanding whose consequences are difficult to assess. The immediate result is that I go to Pontigny tomorrow to meet nice people, read nice books and see a lot of Romanesque and Gothic. But that's only an entr'acte and I've been thinking hard about next year. Professor Powicke<sup>6</sup> is examining my thesis and, provided it's good enough, his report would, I should think, enhance my chances of a Fellowship. On the other hand, much as I would like another two years research, I feel that a teaching diploma is likely to repay me better than a doctorate. "'Tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true.'" If there was any hope of an academic job I'd go out for a Fellowship. But the world being in the parlous state it is, I think I'd better become an efficient teacher, if I possibly can.

And so I won't apply for a fellowship this year. I applied for a Normal Grant last November—I don't think I could afford to train at Manchester—and, as far as I know, I can do nothing now but await Professor Chapple's verdict. I do so without serious qualms, for I know you will help me as much as possible.

I got my thesis in after the customary scurry of last minute rereadings and alterations. It has been beautifully typed and is, in all, 290 pages—230 of text, 35 of appendices—BM and Bodley MSS mostly. I think it's a fairly good piece of work. I've taken great pains over it,

<sup>6</sup>F. M. Powicke, then Regius Professor of History in the University of Oxford.



THE ANGLO-WELSH REVIEW

at least, and the errors will be major ones, if any. Minor inaccuracies have grown fewer with each recension!

If you would like me to come up to Aber after I return in Mid-June, would you write to my home in Aberdare?

For the present, I wish you the best spring weather and enough leisure to enjoy it.

Yours sincerely,  
Alun Lewis.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
June 21st [1937]

Dear Professor Treharne,

I've just returned home after six weeks in Pontigny, in the middle of the most beautiful country I have ever seen. Six weeks in a C12th conventual building with my bedroom window looking onto the portail of the Abbey Church, onto the canons walking studiously up and down the lime avenue, onto the little wizened black clothed women who come to kneel every day under the Christ and who lift their black umbrellas up against the sun. And bicycle rides to Auxerre and Chablis and Vezelay and through the cool forest and past the little hot villages, silent, brown-roofed, fast asleep.

It's quite impossible to describe it all and in any case you're too busy with exams to read it. So I'll curb my enthusiasm. I expect you have heard the verdict of Profs. Jacob and Powicke—I'm glad and relieved that such an august tribunal should have acquitted me of incompetence, and I'm half sorry I was too prudent to apply for a Fellowship. But perhaps it's for the best. Anyhow, I think I'll try and get a teaching job without having to spend a year's training, if possible. And with that resolve I begin to scrutinise the Times Educational Supplement. And in case I'm successful in eliciting a response from the great god Employment, would you be so kind as to furnish me with a Testimonial? I'm sorry to trouble you at this busy time, and I'm willing to postpone my importunate demand for a few days.

I hope to get my Ottobuono article into shape in the next week and get down to some reading again after my loquacious sojourn among the Burgundians. And so for the present I take my leave.

Yours sincerely,  
Alun Lewis.

ALUN LEWIS

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
March 27th [1938]

Dear Professor Treharne,

Thank you very much for your letter and its exciting news. The job sounds a pleasant one and I would naturally like to get it. I will watch the Times Educational Supplement for the advertisement—there is nothing in this week's edition—and make a big effort.

You sent me a Testimonial last summer which I should think is up to date enough. You might, perhaps, like to revise it, so I am enclosing it in this letter. I had hoped to hear from Goronwy Edwards<sup>7</sup> concerning my article on Leyburn. Powicke read it and recommended it for acceptance to E.H.R. about five weeks ago, but the verdict has not been delivered from G.H.Q. Still, I think a reference to it would not come amiss in my application. I have sold a few poems this winter, too,—to Time and Tide and the Observer. I suppose they will apply to the Training Department for an opinion of my teaching capacity, at a later stage.

I am really very grateful for your interest and for the way you have so kindly forearmed me.

Yours sincerely,  
Alun Lewis.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
April 9th [1938]

Dear Professor Treharne,

Thank you very much for your letter and for the testimonial, and still more for the time it has cost you. It would be most unkind of the blind goddess if no doors open to its Sesame despite the pains you have taken!

I am still waiting to see a notice of the vacancy, and my perusal of the Times Ed. has not been very fruitful as yet. There appear to be very few History Jobs going [as yet].

If, during the next few weeks, I find that the likelihood of getting a post is very slender, do you think it would be policy for me to apply for a Fellowship? Mr. Cheney has always advised me very strongly to leave further research—as a full-time occupation—severely

<sup>7</sup>Now Sir Goronwy Edwards. Then Editor of *The English Historical Review* and Senior Tutor of Jesus College, Oxford.

alone, and I know that academic jobs are hard to come by. Still, I would be doing useful work and that is far healthier than sitting down waiting for jobs.

Anyhow, I am writing this now, not with the object of taking immediate steps, but merely because the project has been in my mind for a long time. Perhaps you will be kind enough to discuss it with me some time next term.

Thanking you once again for your help,

I remain,

Alun Lewis.

P.S. I have been intending to show you my Leyburn article, but as Professor Jacob still has my carbon copy, I am forced to wait his pleasure.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Dec. 6th [1938]

Dear Professor Treharne,

It's a long time since I wrote last to you and it's a long time since I started applying for jobs. Sometimes that's how the last four months looks like. At other times it seems to have been a useful and free existence. Perhaps even more so just now, when I am entering my second week as temporary History Master at Pengam<sup>8</sup>—following in Sanders' footsteps! I've come in just before terminals and consequently have been up till the small hours 'swotting' and setting papers. And now the deluge of scripts is upon me, together with a running cold. Strangely enough, I'm enjoying it!

I finish my job on December 16th and see no immediate hope of getting another. I've had one interview only—for a modern school in London, back in July. The world is abominably full. And my efforts at getting into journalism—even to the extent of learning short hand and working on our local weekly News—have not resulted in anything except a series of polite rebuffs. Consequently I do not look with much hope on a vacancy I was notified about today—the post of History Lecturer (£400 increasing to £700) at New England University College, Armidale, University of Sydney, Australia. But I feel very tempted to try my luck and so I am writing to ask you whether you think I have a reasonable chance, and if you do, whether you would back my application, which has to reach Sydney by December 31st.

I am enclosing a copy of my application for ordinary teaching posts, which includes the testimonial you gave me last year. I wonder

<sup>8</sup> At: The Lewis School.

whether you would be kind enough to alter it where necessary? If you signed the altered MS, I could type it out here and send it off.

I have returned the proofs of my Leyburn article to E.H.R. some months ago, and hope to see my opus magnum appearing there soon. I have had some literary successes—two broadcasts and work in the Manchester Guardian and the Dublin Magazine. I've also tried to run a WEA class, but after 6 lectures, it's had to fall through for reasons over which I had no control.

I am sorry to be troubling you again, but I know you are very generous with your help, and thank you accordingly.

Yours sincerely

Alun Lewis.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
Feb 21st [1939]

Dear Professor Treharne,

Thank you very much for writing to me about the B.B.C. job. I have not seen it advertised anywhere yet, so, in case your informant is mistaken, and in case it is in Wales—being a non-Welsh-speaker I am ineligible—I will not take advantage of your kind offer until I find out more about it.

I am still filling the breach at Pengam—the history master has gone to Talgarth<sup>9</sup> for a few months, and I will almost certainly stay in school until the end of July. I am quite pleased with it—I find the work very heavy for I have every form except the IIs—about 200 boys—and Senior and Higher forms studying the Nineteenth Century. You can imagine the reading I have to do—perhaps I'd do less if I hadn't been taught to suspect History!

My article on Leyburn is coming out in the April number of E.H.R. I hope you will not be ashamed of your protégé's first—and apparently last(!)—effort.

I still apply for jobs and, comme d'habitude, hear nothing more of them. But as I'm busy enough at Pengam I don't have time to worry about anything else.

I hope you and Mrs. Treharne are both well and looking forward to the break of Inter-Coll. week. I'd gladly be a student again for the next few days!

Yours sincerely,

Alun Lewis.

<sup>9</sup> To the South Wales Sanatorium (for tuberculosis patients).



7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
April 21st [1939]

Dear Professor Treharne,

I hope you will accept the enclosed off-print of my E.H.R. article. It might be useful for you in this form—in any case I would like you to have it, as a token of my obligation to you.

I am too busy teaching History to bother with writing any at present; and seem likely to be so until July, for my job will last till then and I have about 60 CWB pupils on my conscience. They're doing their best to ruin my holiday—all today I've been reading Keir's Constitutional History in the sunny garden, for instance. Tomorrow I'll take my revenge by going to Gower.<sup>10</sup>

Things are fairly fair in my world—I hope to get a volume of poems and another of short stories published fairly soon—negotiations are in progress—but foreign affairs make all plans very provisional.

I hope you and Mrs. Treharne are both well. Aber must be a lovely place in this weather!

Yours sincerely,  
Alun Lewis.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
May 16th [1939]

Dear Professor Treharne,

Thank you for sending me the notice of the Hawarden Scholarship—thank you too for your kind words regarding my E.H.R. article. I'm glad you consider it worth doing.

With respect to the Gladstone Scholarship I think I'd better leave it alone, though I do feel tempted to apply for it. I've been considering the project of applying for a research Schol. for next year—either a Meyricke<sup>11</sup> or a Fellowship of Wales; preferably the latter, for I feel I would like to work on Welsh History of the last two centuries. The topic I think most suitable is the Land Question, which I imagine would be a fairly well-documented and interesting field to explore. But I haven't had time to make any serious survey of the material—it's mainly a "hunch."

<sup>10</sup> Presumably to the cottage at Port Eynon which he used for writing.

<sup>11</sup> At Jesus College, Oxford.

The problem is—how long will my present post last, and what chance have I of getting another? I doubt whether the man I'm under-studying will be back till next Christmas, but on the other hand I'm not sanguine with regard to other posts. So far I've drawn a blank and jobs seem fewer than last year.

It's a difficult problem. Perhaps I'd better defer any decision regarding the Gladstone Scholarship till July. With regard to the Fellowship, I don't know whether I'm qualified to apply, now that I've left the University. In any case I think it would be to my advantage to stay in school till next November, in order to complete my year of probation.

That is my position, since you have been kind enough to ask about it. May I assume, then, that if I do apply for the Gladstone later in the summer, that you will support my application? And meanwhile I suppose I'd better hope for a fixed job!

I am returning the form, and have made a note of its content.

Yours sincerely  
Alun Lewis.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
Dec. 1st [1939]

Dear Professor Treharne,

It's a long time since I wrote to you last—as it happens no news is good news. I've been teaching—that's the sum of it. My job was made "permanent" last week, my predecessor having died in Talgarth, poor man. His T.B. was due to inability to control boys—they wore him down with their ragging.

I like teaching—I think most people start with apprehensions and find themselves pleasantly surprised. I get on very well with boys—play rugby and join in their Debates and so on. And in History I'm running a competition in keeping scrapbooks and also an exhibition case with a weekly exhibit (on the National Museum plan) brought by the boys. I seem to value it more, not less—this school activity—since Europe went in for death on a large scale. My brother has been called up and I suppose I'll follow. Meantime—well, I'm writing a novel as well!

Constable's were going to publish a volume of my poems when war intervened. Now they're taking the idea up again. I'm not very sanguine, though. That sort of thing doesn't stand much chance. I was writing regularly for the Welsh Review till it ended, too. That's the worst of a blackout; it spreads.

Two or three of my sixth form boys are going to sit the Aber Scholarship at Easter. They came to me, very perturbed, saying that the

History paper was only partly on their period—What were they to do? I said Work! They replied they had enough work as it is with their Higher syllabus, and asked me to find out whether the same period will be set this year also. I myself am very interested in your new departure—it raises very far-reaching questions, and I'd very much value a word from you about it. Is it intended that VIth form boys should spend a year after Higher in General reading for University Scholarships? As the other subjects are in line with the Higher syllabus, it presumably is the policy of the department rather than of the College. With the very heavy Higher syllabus now in force it seems to me almost impossible to sit schools and Higher in two years. And some of them can't afford to spend a third year. Nevertheless, I fancy it will seed out the genuine students—I have one very sound boy this year. Next year I hope to send you a State Scholar—he's just come up to the VIth this year and his essays are both sensitive and bold. Dickens is his favourite author!

I hope Mrs Treharne and Elizabeth are both well. I hear about Aber from my uncle<sup>12</sup> and Oxford from Christopher Cheney, but I personally stay in Pengam.

Best wishes for a pleasant Xmas.

Yours sincerely,

Alun Lewis.

7 Elm Grove,  
Aberdare,  
Glam.  
Jan 8th [1940]

Dear Professor Treharne,

Thank you very much for your letter—I feel that you dealt with me more fully than I deserved!—I suppose it was my fault for writing so contentious an epistle in the first place. Now may I try to answer your points? I know you would prefer me to be plain and I will therefore risk seeming arrogant.

Firstly, I agree with your alteration with respect to the exam syllabus, but wonder how far it is likely to solve your problem. I should think that either the teacher will coach the boys for the new syllabus, or the boys, if they show no originality in the set H.C. period, are unlikely to show any elsewhere. That is, I believe a boy will show his quality inevitably, whatever he is set to answer.

Secondly, I do not agree that the H.C. years are ample for outside work. It's a period of growth in the boy's life and I believe that his

<sup>12</sup>His father's brother: Professor of Celtic Studies at the University.

eagerness for ideas and information is offset by the derangement and restlessness that accompany growth. Certainly it was so in my case and I notice it in my own pupils. They're trying their wings. Therefore they flutter around. I don't think I *migrated* until I was near the end of my academic career. There my particular case is very different from yours. So it's clearly difficult to generalise. I have only one real caveat—It is this: IF boys read outside their period, they will not *study* what they read. They could talk to you in a viva about it, but not answer an Entrance Scholarship paper on it. Myself, I think 1780 to 1900 a sufficiently wide field for the most discursive 17 year old. Dickens, Marx, the French Revolution, Germany, Industry—and a flood of first class books bristling with controversy, ranging from Bertrand Russell to Croce! My lessons are discussions and we have more than enough to argue about.

But you know all this, of course. Only I would very much like to know how you are solving the thorny problem of selecting the winners. I'm sending two very steady workers up at Easter, very nice zealous boys whose style is being ground slowly between my millstones. But they aren't outstanding. Next year, perhaps, a thoroughbred!

Might I suggest a compulsory question on *contemporary* events in your paper?

As for teaching the lower forms, I try to be as creative as possible—or rather more than creative. I use source material a lot—aerial photographs of Pre-Roman camps and Roman towns, extracts from Chronicles, and for the medieval period postcards and the episcopo. I've got a nice collection of cards—cathedrals, monasteries, illuminations and paintings, and I also run a little exhibition case. Then I approach the writing work by three avenues—imaginative descriptions—a Commissioner of Rome inspecting British fortifications, for instance—; map-work, which they love—all of them now use coloured pencils and my lower school examination scripts are very pleasant to look at after the feverish scribbling of their seniors!; and lastly, a scientific accounting of cause and effect, loss and gain. This is all more easily said than done. I should say I *try* to do it. And enjoy the attempt. I don't know whether the Horse Guards Parade will make use of my limited experience, though. I shall be registering soon, and I feel pretty sick about it. Your wise advice about not hurrying my novel is therefore difficult for me to follow. Oh well, the melting pot is boiling over; that's all there is to it.

My best wishes to you and Mrs Treharne and Elizabeth for the New Year.

Yours very sincerely,

Alun Lewis.

# Alun Lewis

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Alun Lewis** (1 July 1915 - 5 March 1944), was a poet of the Anglo-Welsh school<sup>[1]</sup>, and is regarded by many as Britain's finest Second World War poet <sup>[2]</sup>.

## Contents

- 1 Education
- 2 Early work
- 3 Tragic end
- 4 One of his poems
- 5 Works
- 6 Biography
- 7 References

## Education

He was born at Cwmaman, near Aberdare in one of the South Wales Valleys, the Cynon Valley, in the South Wales Coalfield. His father was a school teacher and he had a younger sister, Mair. By the time he attended Cowbridge Grammar School, he was already interested in writing. He went on to the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth and the University of Manchester, Manchester. He was unsuccessful as a journalist and instead earned his living as a supply teacher.

## Early work

Lewis met the poet Lynette Roberts, whose poem "Llanybri" is an invitation to him to visit her home; but she was married to another poet, Keidrych Rhys. In 1939, Lewis met Gweno Ellis, a teacher, whom he married in 1941. In 1941, he collaborated with artists John Petts and Brenda Chamberlain on the "Caseg broadsheets". Although best known as a poet, his first published work was a volume of short stories, *The Last Inspection* (1942). In his poem *Raider's Dawn* Lewis makes a biblical reference to Peter and Paul.

## Tragic end

He joined the army in 1940 although he was a pacifist. In 1942 he was sent to India with the South Wales Borderers.

He died in Burma, in the course of the Second World War campaign against the Japanese. He was found shot in the head, after shaving and washing, near the officers' latrines, with his revolver in his hand. He died from the wound six hours later. Despite the suggestion of suicide, an army court of inquiry subsequently concluded that he had tripped and the shooting was an accident.<sup>[3]</sup>

## One of his poems

All Day it has Rained

All day it has rained, and we on the edge of the moors  
Have sprawled in our bell-tents, moody and dull as boors,

Groundsheets and blankets spread on the muddy ground  
And from the first grey waking we have found

No refuge from the skirmishing fine rain  
And the wind that made the canvas heave and flap  
And the taut wet guy-ropes ravel out and snap,  
All day the rain has glided, wave and mist and dream,  
Drenching the gorse and heather, a gossamer stream  
Too light to stir the acorns that suddenly  
Snatched from their cups by the wild south-westerly  
Pattered against the tent and our upturned dreaming faces.  
And we stretched out, unbuttoning our braces,  
Smoking a Woodbine, darning dirty socks,  
Reading the Sunday papers – I saw a fox  
And mentioned it in the note I scribbled home;

And we talked of girls and dropping bombs on Rome,  
And thought of the quiet dead and the loud celebrities  
Exhorting us to slaughter, and the herded refugees;  
– Yet thought softly, morosely of them, and as indifferently  
As of ourselves or those whom we  
For years have loved, and will again  
Tomorrow maybe love; but now it is the rain  
Possesses us entirely, the twilight and the rain.

And I can remember nothing dearer or more to my heart  
Than the children I watched in the woods on Saturday  
Shaking down burning chestnuts for the schoolyard's merry play  
Or the shaggy patient dog who followed me  
By Sheet and Steep and up the wooded scree  
To the Shoulder o' Mutton where Edward Thomas brooded long  
On death and beauty – till a bullet stopped his song.

## Works

- *Raiders' Dawn and other poems* (1942)
- *The Last Inspection and other stories* (1942)
- *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets. Poems in Transit* (1945)
- *Letters from India*, edited by Gweno Lewis & Gwyn Jones (1946)
- *In the Green Tree* (letters & stories) (1948)
- *Selected Poetry and Prose*, edited by Ian Hamilton (1966)
- *Selected Poems of Alun Lewis*, edited by Jeremy Hooker and Gweno Lewis (1981)
- *Alun Lewis. A Miscellany of His Writings*, edited by John Pikoulis (1982)
- *Letters to My Wife*, edited by Gweno Lewis (Seren Books: 1989)
- *Collected Stories*, edited by Cary Archard (Seren Books, 1990)
- *Collected Poems*, edited by Cary Archard (Seren Books, 1994)
- *A Cypress Walk. Letters to 'Frieda'*, with a memoir by Freda Aykroyd (Enitharmon Press, 2006)

## Biography

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