



GLANMOR WILLIAMS

# Glanmor Williams

## 1920–2005

IT IS A WELL-KNOWN FACT that adult males born in Wales are the shortest in Britain, and on a good day Glanmor Williams measured just over five feet in his stockinged feet. But physical stature has never mattered to the natives of Dowlais, and this Lilliputian man, by dint of intellectual brilliance, far-sighted vision and exceptional personal charm, achieved towering eminence in the field of Welsh historical studies. At most gatherings he cut a compelling figure, and he was particularly adept at turning his smallness to advantage. Having famously written in the preface to his first big book that the work had ‘like Topsy, “just grewed”’, it amused him thereafter to reproach nature for denying him the same opportunity.<sup>1</sup> When he was chairman of the Broadcasting Council for Wales in the late 1960s, he impishly confessed never to have been able to see eye to eye with the impossibly tall Controller of the BBC in Wales, Alun Oldfield-Davies. On another occasion there was much mirth in the Williams household when a reporter described him in the *Evening News* as a ‘pint-sized but very eloquent professor of history’.<sup>2</sup> Few Welsh scholars in the modern era have served their profession, university and country as admirably as this diminutive giant and the flourishing condition of Welsh historical studies during the last half century is in considerable measure attributable to his influence. Yet, in spite of his unrivalled standing as a Welsh historian and the weight of honours he accumulated over the years, he remained unspoiled by his academic successes and public achievements,

<sup>1</sup> Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff, 1962), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> N[ational L]ibrary of W[ales], Glanmor Williams Diaries, 17 July 1969.

It is to his great credit that he remained, without side or pretence, a humble man, the quintessential ‘little boy from Dowlais’ (*‘bachan bech o Ddowlis’*).

By friends and colleagues alike, Glanmor Williams was known as Glan, and his charming autobiography, published in 2002, is pervaded with a burning sense of pride in, and affection for, his birthplace.<sup>3</sup> He was born on 5 May 1920 in Dowlais, Glamorgan, the only son of Daniel and Ceinwen Williams, both of whom were of rural stock but were also Dowlais-born. His appearance was a surprise to his parents, who had fully expected a girl, but they showered affection on him and swiftly detected his precociousness. Bringing up children in a community scarred by deprivation and suffering was a daunting prospect, though the working people of Dowlais prided themselves on their ability to work wonders through sheer hard work and sacrifice. Built by the Guest family, Dowlais held—and still holds—an iconic position in the history of the industrial revolution in Wales. But when the furnaces of the steelworks which had traditionally lit up the sky at night with a red glow were closed down in 1930, over 3,000 men were consigned to the dole queues and the region became ravaged by unemployment, deprivation and out-migration. ‘See Dowlais and sigh’,<sup>4</sup> murmured the poet Idris Davies as he witnessed malnourished people scrabbling for coal on the slag tips or kicking their heels on street corners. People now lived more in dread of the workhouse than of the might of the Guests. Yet, despite the privations, Glanmor experienced a happy and fulfilling childhood and, as was the case for many Victorian and Edwardian writers, ‘the remembrance of [his] childhood and [his] youth was the sweetest of pleasures’.<sup>5</sup> Blessed with an unusually retentive memory, he recalled the humorous banter of colliers as they trudged in their heavy hobnailed boots through the town, the bike rides to local reservoirs, and the picnics in rural Breconshire during hot summer months. But what struck him most forcibly was the warmth, altruism and courage of the industrial *gwerin*, the proletariat who endured probably the most lamentable economic crisis since the Black Death. Even though another diminutive Dowlais-born historian, Gwyn A. Williams, would have us believe that there were reds under every bed in ‘dismal

<sup>3</sup> Glanmor Williams, *A Life* (Cardiff, 2002), chap. 1. See also idem, ‘Eira Ddoe: Cofio Dowlais’, *Taliesin*, 69 (1990), 12–19.

<sup>4</sup> Dafydd Johnston (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies* (Cardiff, 1994), p. 127.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Parker, *The English Idea of History from Coleridge to Collingwood* (Aldershot, 1988), p. 119.

Dowlais' during this malaise,<sup>6</sup> the democratic socialism espoused by Glanmor was clearly the prevailing gospel in this community. His admiration for the selfless humanity of common people knew no bounds and it deeply affected his values as a historian and his own moral and intellectual development. When he wrote on the Tudor period he rather liked using George Owen's depiction of the lower orders as 'the general and common sort of people' and he strongly empathised with them.<sup>7</sup> Many years later, when he received the coveted medal of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, he wrote: 'May we always have an ear delicately attuned to the still small voice of our common humanity.'<sup>8</sup>

Although Glanmor's parents began life with few advantages and were not well-educated in the formal sense, they were determined to ensure that he was properly fed, clothed and schooled. Badly shaken on three separate occasions by accidents in the pits, his father abandoned his mandrel and hobnail boots to become an insurance agent and, subsequently, a factory worker. Even though he earned little more than dole money, he was an omnivorous and intelligent reader who plied his son with books. Music and tales from the past figured prominently on the hearth and, on his grandfather's knee, Glanmor was regaled with stories of local heroes like Ifor Bach, Dic Penderyn, Lewsyn yr Heliwr, Henry Richard and Keir Hardie, and was more than once reminded that British governments had a long and unsavoury reputation for dispatching troops into industrial South Wales and shooting innocent people. From an early age, therefore, Glanmor assimilated an interpretation of the working-class political tradition which, though partial, was a formative influence on his thinking. His Christian upbringing also planted within him a profound understanding of the way in which spiritual values underpinned moral virtue, social justice and good neighbourliness. He became a devout Baptist chapelgoer and, although English was increasingly viewed in this multi-ethnic society as the language of 'getting on',<sup>9</sup> his Welsh-speaking parents introduced him to the extraordinarily lively and well-attended

<sup>6</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, *Fishers of Men: Stories towards an Autobiography* (Llandysul, 1996), pp. 11–24. For the contrasting careers and values of these two strikingly different Dowlais-born historians, see Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Dau Fachan Bech o Ddowlis', in Hywel Teifi Edwards (ed.), *Merthyr a Thaf* (Llandysul, 2001), pp. 192–226.

<sup>7</sup> Glanmor Williams, *The General and Common Sort of People 1540–1640* (University of Exeter, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'History and Creation', *Book News from Wales*, Winter (1991), 4–5.

<sup>9</sup> Geraint H. Jenkins and Mari A. Williams (eds.), '*Let's Do Our Best for the Ancient Tongue*': *The Welsh Language in the Twentieth Century* (Cardiff, 2000), *passim*.

eisteddfodau, singing festivals and soirées (complete with jellies and blancmanges) which were part of the cultural fabric of Nonconformist life. At one stage he thought that he might become a Baptist minister. The poet Dyfnallt Morgan, whose impressive *prydeest* ‘*Y Llen*’ (The Veil) was a commentary on how English became the lingua franca in the Merthyr area, recalled hearing Glanmor at the age of eight reciting Welsh prose and poetry for an hour and a half in Calfaria chapel on Dowlais Top.<sup>10</sup> When he was sixteen, his prize-winning essay ‘*Dowlais fel yr Eos*’ (Dowlais like the Nightingale), was published on St David’s Day in the *Western Mail*.<sup>11</sup> A few months earlier King Edward VIII had visited Dowlais and, visibly shocked by the dereliction and suffering, he reputedly said ‘something must be done’.<sup>12</sup> In the event, nothing was done. The government turned a blind eye to the economic malaise and the sovereign abdicated the throne in order to marry his American mistress. Meanwhile, Glanmor resolved to repay his debt to his parents by pursuing his studies at school with renewed zeal. Over his whole life he possessed a strong desire to succeed.

In 1937, armed with a battery of scholarships and glowing references gained at Cyfarthfa Castle Grammar School, he went to the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, to read History and Welsh. Like many of his age, he was the first member of the family to enter higher education. He was immediately struck by the heart-warming *esprit de corps* which prevailed among the c.700 students, and his years at ‘the College by the Sea’ proved to be among the happiest of his life. Aberystwyth was no cultural backwater. Its vigorous Welsh-language activities had never been more thriving, and when invited speakers such as Vera Brittain, Jan Masaryk, Josiah Stamp and Albert Schweitzer arrived they were bowled over by the ‘Aber spirit’. Glanmor appreciated ‘the spontaneous camaraderie, the happy we’re-all-one-family attitude of Aber students’<sup>13</sup> and partook fully in their time-honoured habits—kicking the bar, quadding, hoaxes, ambushes, and mock funerals—as well as figuring fleetingly in the college soccer side in 1938–9. Nicknamed ‘Twinkle Toes’, he became the Welsh-language editor of the student magazine, *The Dragon*, in 1940 and

<sup>10</sup> Dyfnallt Morgan, ‘... Deigryn am a fu’: Atgofion am Ddowlais 1917–1935’, *Taliesin*, 71 (1990), 47; Tomos Morgan (ed.), *Rhywbeth i’w Ddweud: Detholiad o Waith Dyfnallt Morgan* (Llandysul, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> *Western Mail*, 1 March 1937.

<sup>12</sup> Ted Rowlands, ‘*Something Must be Done*’: *South Wales v Whitehall 1921–1951* (Merthyr, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> *The Dragon*, 64, no. 3 (1942), p. 2.

also President of the Celtic Society. When he was elected President of the Students' Representative Council in 1941 his speeches were so enthralling that one student claimed: 'My religion is Glanmor Williams, and it's a lot of other people's religion, too, if only they had the honesty to admit it.'<sup>14</sup> Fully aware that education was a precious asset not to be wasted, he worked like a beaver and gained a richly deserved first in History and Welsh. To his dismay, luminaries within the Department of Welsh were so preoccupied with philology, which did not greatly interest him, that his creative gifts were not allowed to blossom. Outside the Department of History, lectures were to be endured rather than enjoyed, and the scholar who left the deepest imprint on him was Professor E. A. Lewis, a distinguished economic historian who had long captured the affection of students by storming to victory in the annual staff race and who, in Glanmor's case, awakened his interest in Tudor Wales. As all self-respecting Welsh scholars should, Glanmor fell in love with the unparalleled resources of the National Library of Wales, and it was with great sorrow that he learned of the sudden death of E. A. Lewis on the Aberystwyth golf course in January 1942. He was mortified, too, when he failed a medical examination to gain admittance into the armed forces. An active member of the OTC, unlike close friends like Dyfnallt Morgan and Emyr Humphreys, he did not hold deeply moral pacifist convictions. But even though he was released from war duties, the experiences of the times meant that there were no funds or opportunities for him to pursue research, a grievous setback which was only partly mitigated by his appointment in 1942 as a teacher of History, Welsh and a little French at Merthyr Intermediate School.

His prospects of an academic career took a turn for the better in 1945 when he was appointed temporary assistant lecturer in History at the University College of Wales, Swansea, where he was given a room in Singleton Abbey, a neo-Gothic pile which had been home to the youngest constituent member of the federal university since 1920. He immediately found life at Swansea—both academic and social—so congenial and fulfilling that he stayed in this 'ugly-lovely town' for the rest of his life. On 6 April 1946 he married Margaret Fay Davies, a native of Cardiff and a fellow History student at Aberystwyth, who had taken up a post as a history teacher at Gowerton Grammar School for Girls. Fay was an ideal partner for him: lively, resourceful, independent and yet caring, she supported him through thick and thin over a marriage which lasted for

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 63, no. 2 (1941), p. 27.

nearly fifty-nine years. Glanmor often maintained that his debt to her was beyond redemption and he readily acknowledged her support as a copy-editor, indexer, proof-reader and confidante. It was she who urged him to persevere at a time when he was struggling to cope with unfamiliar manuscripts for his master's degree on Bishop Richard Davies, one of the most influential and energetic Protestant reformers in Elizabeth's reign, and he reciprocated by supervising her well-regarded thesis on the Society of Friends in Glamorgan.<sup>15</sup> Their lives were further enriched when their daughter Margaret (March 1952), and son Huw (December 1953) were born, and they subsequently derived great pleasure from being in the company of their four grandchildren, Daniel, Elinor, Nia and Eleri, on whom they lavished affection. Swansea suited Glanmor perfectly and he was proud of his adopted town. He served on the magistrates' bench, became a director of the Dillwyn (later Swansea) Building Society, and joined the executive committee of the Swansea Festival of Music and Arts. Those of us who sat at his feet in the sixties were aware that this hectically busy and many-sided figure had his fingers in a large number of pies, and had we been told that he was also Lord Mayor of Swansea, manager of Swansea Town (as it then was) Football Club, and Governor of Swansea prison we would have accepted it as the plain, unvarnished truth. His abiding love for Swansea was evinced in the illustrated history of the city which he was pleased to edit and publish in 1990.<sup>16</sup>

From the outset, Glanmor was eager to make his mark in the groves of academe. Not many Welsh scholars in their late twenties would have dared to demolish, courteously yet firmly, one of Saunders Lewis's misbegotten theories about Protestant history on the pages of *Y Traethodydd*.<sup>17</sup> David B. Quinn, his head of department, thought highly of him, so much so that his lectureship was made permanent and, as his publications began to flow, John Scott Fulton, who had replaced the rather languid Charles Edwards as Principal, saw promise in him and raised him to a senior lectureship in 1952. Fulton's critics believed that his aim was to make Swansea a 'Balliol by the sea' and he certainly embarked on active, large-scale expansion. Glanmor was invited to prepare a blueprint for the future study of Welsh history at the college and, even though his own research interests fell in the early modern period, he was prescient enough

<sup>15</sup> M. Fay Williams, 'The Society of Friends in Glamorgan, 1654-1900', MA thesis (Wales, 1950).

<sup>16</sup> Glanmor Williams (ed.), *Swansea: An Illustrated History* (Swansea, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'Cipdrem arall ar y "ddamcaniaeth eglwysig Brotestannaidd"', *Y Traethodydd*, 16 (1948), 19-57.

to call for investment in the modern period.<sup>18</sup> When David Quinn was appointed to the chair of modern history at Liverpool, an unexpected opportunity arose for him to implement these future lines of inquiry. In 1957, amid some controversy, Glanmor was appointed to the chair by the college council even though both Fulton and Quinn had favoured his rival, Charles Mowat. Hurt, but not embittered, by this unfortunate episode, Glanmor resolved to prove his critics wrong. In retrospect we can appreciate that hardly ever has an appointment associated with Welsh history had such beneficial consequences. He remained the senior professor of history at Swansea until 1982.

Glanmor's inaugural lecture, entitled 'History in a Modern University', delivered in January 1959, is a model of its kind and should be required reading for every apprentice historian. Mindful of Fulton's plans for dynamic expansion, he set out very clearly a manifesto for the study of the social history of Wales and urged the college not to neglect its opportunity to exploit what was likely to prove to be an enormously rich and exciting field:

Historians are no longer wedded to the idea that sovereign states are the supreme end-product of the historical process or that they and the relations between them are the only phenomena worthy of a historian's attention. For that matter there is nothing sacrosanct about the history of a nation either. But it is an interesting and rewarding subject, particularly when you trace down the centuries the subtle and elusive problem of how an ancient and distinctive social and cultural ethos is maintained or modified within a wider political framework. It is one that not unnaturally has a strong appeal for those who belong to that nation. But the justification for Welsh history, or any other history, is not that it bolsters patriotism or national consciousness. It is the sober historical fact that the Welsh have a history of their own which, despite its close links with that of other British peoples, is in marked respects different. It cannot be understood as a regional fag-end of the history of England. Its connecting-thread is not political or constitutional history but social development.<sup>19</sup>

No previous Welsh historian had spoken in these terms, and this statement of intent not only caught the imagination but also came at a propitious moment. Under Fulton's successor, J. H. Parry, a highly distinguished historian, a major new development programme produced new buildings, disciplines and faculties on the campus. With enhanced resources to hand, Glanmor, in the words of the college historian, assembled 'a veritable

<sup>18</sup> Neil Evans, "'When Men and Mountains Meet': Historians' Explanation of the History of Wales, 1890–1970", *Welsh History Review*, 22, no. 2 (2004), 246–8.

<sup>19</sup> Glanmor Williams, *History in a Modern University* (Swansea, 1959), p. 22.



constellation of historical scholarship'.<sup>20</sup> He surrounded himself with high quality teachers and researchers with a strong interest in the history of Wales. Llandysul-born Alun Davies was lured from a Readership at the London School of Economics to fill a new chair of modern history, while Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, a miner's son and a former railway signalman, was persuaded to abandon his studies of Stuart parliaments in favour of the social history of nineteenth-century Wales. Young minds brought fresh ideas and energies. From Oxford came Kenneth O. Morgan (Oriol), Rees Davies (Merton) and Prys Morgan (Jesus), John Davies was a product of Cambridge, and Ralph A. Griffiths was a graduate of Bristol. In the fullness of time, each of these became immensely productive and attained international standing in Clio's vineyard. When some of them moved on, Glanmor replenished his department with social historians like David Jones, David Howell and Peter Stead. His reputation as a talent spotter was unrivalled and, as the study of Welsh history acquired impetus and prestige, even teachers whose principal teaching and research interests lay elsewhere were persuaded to throw in their pennyworth. Neville Masterman wrote a biography of Tom Ellis, Muriel Chamberlain investigated the Welsh in Canada, and David Walker (who was, in this writer's view, the finest lecturer in the department) published a highly regarded textbook on medieval Wales.

These fruitful developments coincided with the post-Robbins years of student expansion. 'More will mean worse', cried Kingsley Amis, lecturer in English at Swansea, without ever indicating whether he was referring to student numbers or his own novels. But historians with a flair for teaching and a desire to encourage innovative postgraduate work welcomed the influx of a new generation of working-class students and braced themselves to face the full impact of what Alun Davies called 'those twin giants, Bulge and Trend'.<sup>21</sup> Leading by precept and example, Glanmor blossomed as a strategist and a policy-maker. Under his benign eye, students realised that, far from being dead and buried, the Welsh past was alive and pregnant with possibilities. History 'from below' became particularly inviting, and grappling with -isms like capitalism, Calvinism and socialism in a Welsh context opened up new vistas. At the same time Glanmor insisted that the history of Wales should never be viewed or taught in isolation, and he could never be persuaded that ring-fencing autonomous departments of Welsh history within the federal university

<sup>20</sup> David Dykes, *The University College of Swansea: An Illustrated History* (Stroud, 1992), p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> Alun Davies, *Modern History in a University* (Swansea, 1961), pp. 3–4.

was the only sure-fire way of protecting the interests of the subject, though the ebbing fortunes of Welsh history at Swansea following his retirement would appear to suggest that in this instance he was misguided. At any rate, he and his colleagues established a far more progressive and stimulating syllabus at Swansea than that found in most other British universities, and their labour bore fruit in the form of robust postgraduate schools. Glanmor's great achievement was to place the study of Welsh history in its rightful place within broader academic and intellectual studies.

Glanmor delighted in the company of students and readily won their trust and admiration. More than any other Welsh remembrancer, he radiated a sense of enjoyment while pursuing his scholarly tasks and in the classroom, and although some of the more morose students would have liked more histrionics and tired of his 'three causes and four results' approach the majority marvelled at the way in which he threaded his way through the centuries with such assurance and verve. He was punctilious in marking essays and scripts, and his beautifully neat handwriting was a wonder to behold. Though seldom one to lose his temper (at least not in public), he was not averse to showing his displeasure whenever students misbehaved in classrooms or failed to meet required scholarly standards. Always reacting to unreasonable demands with conspicuous good sense and moderation, he served as one of the first masters of the two new Singleton halls—Sibly and Lewis Jones—in 1961–2. Even though he heartily disliked administrative chores, his appointment as the first dean of a new faculty of economic and social studies in 1964 enabled him to promote the interdisciplinary approaches he favoured. Although it was not a role that he relished, as Vice-Principal of the college in 1975–8 he made a valuable contribution to the smooth and efficient running of the institution. And whenever things went awry, his perennially cheerful and obliging departmental secretary, Mrs P. M. Thomas (whom staff and students adored), was there to rescue him.

Although Glanmor took a lively interest in the university and college gossip which filtered through the corridors, he had little patience with the machinations of other senior historians elsewhere and would not on any account be a party to their intrigue. On one occasion he was plainly shocked to discover evidence of 'the fine Italian conspiratorial hand of D[avid] W[illiams]',<sup>22</sup> the founding father of modern Welsh history, and he privately condemned the examples of bias and sentiment which ran deep in the constituent institutions of the University of Wales. It would

<sup>22</sup> NLW, Glanmor Williams Diaries, 4 April 1967.

have been remarkable, of course, had he not used his own considerable clout to further the careers of those who were gifted and dear to him, but he realised that the key to success in the murky world of college intrigue lay in thorough preparation. At meetings and interviews, especially those which he chaired, no single member was better prepared or more alive to possible outcomes. As a result, Glanmor not only retained his uncompromising integrity but also always remained one step ahead of colleagues, rivals and enemies.

In order to promote his subject, Glanmor was also determined to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the federal University. Defederalists believed that the administrative machinery of the University of Wales resulted in duplication, delay and frustration. To some extent, this was true, but Glanmor knew full well that the institution was inextricably bound up with a sense of nationhood and that some of its central organs, especially the Board of Celtic Studies, could help him to fulfil his mission. First elected to the History and Law Committee in 1948, he remained a member of the Board for over forty years. Virtually all his books were published by the University of Wales Press and, as he confessed in 1991, 'the University of Wales has been to me an Abraham's bosom and there I have lain content and secure'.<sup>23</sup> Although the Board of Celtic Studies was hampered by lack of funds, Glanmor also detected a lack of vision and energy. As far as Welsh history was concerned, there was no single learned journal which specialised in the field and this meant that the subject was not only poorly understood but also lacked an international profile. Although the idea of establishing a Welsh historical journal was first mooted in 1954 by Glyn Roberts, Professor of Welsh History at Bangor, one suspects that Glanmor was the principal driving force behind this notion during the late fifties. He was elected editor of the *Welsh History Review* in October 1957, the first issue of which emerged in 1960. The launching of this attractive scholarly journal was a major turning point in Welsh historical studies and it remains to this day the principal flagship of the profession. In June 1966 Glanmor yielded the editorial reins to Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph A. Griffiths who, over a period of thirty-eight years, kept the 'bright and steadily burning lamp of scholarship' shining within its covers.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See his address on the occasion of the award of the Cymmrodorion medal, *Trans. Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1991), 25.

<sup>24</sup> Ieuan Gwynedd Jones and Glanmor Williams, 'The Castor and Pollux of Welsh History', in R. R. Davies and Geraint H. Jenkins (eds.), *From Medieval to Modern Wales: Historical Essays in Honour of Kenneth O. Morgan and Ralph A. Griffiths* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 12.

By this stage he was also thinking about how best to bring the work of postgraduates and other young researchers into the public domain and how to broaden access to the Welsh past. ‘No N. Y. resolutions’, he wrote in his diary on 1 January 1967, ‘but plenty of aspirations.’<sup>25</sup> The lumbering machinery of the History and Law Committee was cranked into action once more and in its quinquennial proposals in 1972 it declared its intention of sponsoring a series of monographs based on the best post-graduate theses in Welsh history and also a series of six volumes on the History of Wales. As one might expect, there were dissenting voices on the committee but, tiring of aimless talk and procrastination, Glanmor offered the members a clear sense of direction and a set of achievable targets. The committee grasped the nettle and appointed Glanmor, Ralph A. Griffiths and Kenneth O. Morgan editors of a series entitled ‘Studies in Welsh History’. Beginning in 1977 with the publication of F. G. Cowley’s *The Monastic Order in South Wales, 1066–1349*, this series of monographs disseminated more widely than ever before the research findings of young scholars. Its chronological range was impressive—from the medieval governance of Gwynedd to work and social conflict in Merthyr and from the Bute family to the Welsh in Scranton—and by the end of the second millennium twenty volumes had been published. The second major enterprise—a multi-volume ‘History of Wales’ published jointly by the Clarendon Press and the University of Wales Press—brought more than its share of vexations. Doubting Thomases maintained that the time was not ripe for a full-scale series, but Glanmor relentlessly pursued the matter, arguing that it was both practicable and desirable for the Welsh to have their own authoritative, standard history from the earliest times onwards. Once more his opponents caved in and thus was born another major undertaking with which his name became associated as general editor. In the event, some of the selected authors fell by the wayside and, at the time of writing, two volumes still remain outstanding, but the four substantial volumes published by 1987 vindicated Glanmor by providing a wide-ranging and stimulating guide to the social and political development of Wales through the centuries.<sup>26</sup> Each of these initiatives is a striking example of how an eloquent, single-minded

<sup>25</sup> NLW, Glanmor Williams Diaries, 1 Jan. 1967.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880–1980* (Oxford, 1981); R. R. Davies, *Conquest, Co-existence and Change: Wales 1063–1415* (Oxford, 1987); Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales c.1415–1642* (Oxford, 1987); Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales: Wales 1642–1780* (Oxford, 1987).

individual was able to bring a sense of unity and purpose to the mission of Welsh historians.

Such demanding enterprises would have over-taxed the strength of most mortals, but Glanmor also had another bold and onerous plan under way relating to the county of Glamorgan. Just as he transformed the prospects of the national history of Wales, so did he strive to recover the deep historical roots of his native shire. Glamorgan mattered deeply to him and he knew that its history lay at the heart of the making of modern Wales. As early as 1947 he had been one of the founders of the journal *Gower* and had served it well as joint editor and contributor. He was also chiefly responsible for establishing *Morgannwg*, the journal of the Glamorgan Local History Society, editing its first three numbers and subsequently becoming the Society's Vice-President and President. This paved the way for a much more challenging venture in 1960 as the general editor (and saviour) of the long-standing but incomplete Glamorgan County History. First conceived in 1931, this project had just one volume to its name at that stage, published as long ago as 1936. With his wife Fay as his assistant, Glanmor breathed new life into this moribund undertaking by adding it to his editorial portfolio. Some of his friends believed that he had taken leave of his senses, but Glanmor did not believe that regional and local history were peripheral matters of no concern to the professional historian. As a proud Glamorgan citizen, moreover, his sense of public duty prompted him to drive the programme forward with all the rigour and energy he could muster. He appointed five editors for each of the remaining volumes, not all of whom, regrettably, fulfilled their remit. Although he had every right to feel badly let down, he persevered and whenever untoward circumstances prevented individual contributors from honouring their promises he either stepped into the breach or recruited able substitutes. He greeted the arrival of the final volume, published in time for the centenary of the founding of the Glamorgan County Council in 1989, with a profound sense of delight and relief. In total the six volumes, weighing fifteen kilograms, were probably heavier than the general editor himself, and the whole undertaking could easily have sent a lesser man to an early grave. By any standards, it was a magnificent achievement.

This proud son and grandson of a collier was also the guiding hand in the late 1960s behind an innovative coalfield research project established at Swansea and funded by the Social Sciences Research Council. Time was of the essence: the severe contraction of the coal industry in south Wales meant that valuable historical material was in danger of vanishing

forever. By assembling a 'small but hyper-active team of postgraduate students'<sup>27</sup> and supervising their work, Glanmor helped to rescue and collect a diverse range of personal and institutional records, which became the core of the newly established South Wales Coalfield Archive at the college library. It was a proud moment in his life when the South Wales Miners' Library was opened at Hendrefoelan House, Swansea, in October 1973.<sup>28</sup> This new resource provided an enormous fillip to the newly founded Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History, whose journal *Llafur* (founded in 1972) provided opportunities for students of Welsh social and labour history to publish their findings and for people from all walks of life to benefit from them. Once more a coherent programme of action had borne rich fruit.

Yet, Glanmor's international reputation as a scholar rests mainly on his unrivalled expertise as an early modern historian, and the importance and influence of his work on the late medieval and Tudor period in particular can hardly be overestimated. As a church historian bent on making sense of the past, he pondered long and hard over the nature of historical knowledge, over issues such as truth and objectivity, and over his own duty as a practising Christian to recreate the past in 'as full, accurate, reasonable and impartial' manner as could be expected.<sup>29</sup> Although the pain of living in a post-Christian society and of witnessing the decline of chapelgoing left a profound mark on him, he was sensible of the responsibility of analysing and indeed celebrating the 'ancient privilege and great honour' (to quote Bishop Richard Davies) which constituted the spiritual patrimony of the Welsh. From around 1950 onwards he set himself the task of writing a major study of the Reformation in Wales. It soon dawned on him, however, that he could not hope to do justice to this decisive event without understanding the nature of the Church in late medieval Wales. His friends warned him that since the sources were patchy and inadequate this might prove to be a minefield for an innocent trespasser. Others reminded him that medieval scholars were prone to be precious and proprietorial about their field of study. But, as we have seen, Glanmor could never resist a challenge and, with the help of a Leverhulme fellowship in 1956–7, he turned himself into a medievalist by

<sup>27</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'Dr Joseph Gross and the Standing Conference for the History of the South Wales Valleys', *Merthyr Historian*, 15 (2003), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Merfyn Jones, 'The Swansea Project', *Llafur*, 1, no. 1 (1972), 33–4; Hywel Francis, 'An Educational Citadel: The South Wales Miners' Library', *Welsh Historian*, no. 11 (1989), 19–22.

<sup>29</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Cymru a'r Gorffennol: Côr o Leisiau* (Llandysul, 2000), p. 55.

embarking on a major research programme into the ecclesiastical history of Wales between 1282 and 1517, an undertaking which culminated in his superlative book, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (1962), in which he displayed a magisterial grasp of the sources and of the period. Glanmor had always had a deep feeling for literature and he was the first professional Welsh historian (if we discount Ambrose Bebb) to use literary evidence as a means of shedding light on the broad religious and social background of the period and of weaving this material into the narrative in a wholly satisfying way. Reviewers in Wales were agreed that it was a scrupulously fair and open-minded volume, while David Knowles, the Benedictine monk and historian, who was probably the best qualified scholar outside Wales to pass judgement, pronounced it 'a great book . . . planned on an ample scale and executed in masterly fashion'.<sup>30</sup> No more seminal work in the field of Welsh historical scholarship had been published since J. E. Lloyd's *History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (1911). A revised edition of Glanmor's tour de force was published in 1976 and it remains one of the bedrocks of Welsh historiography. It is a book that will surely live forever.

A stream of more modest studies and articles on the Reformation then followed which highlighted the efforts of a small but determined band of Welsh Protestant reformers and humanists to promote the religious welfare of their compatriots, strengthen their native tongue, and preserve their own sense of national identity in the post-Union era. His collection of essays, *Welsh Reformation Essays* (1967), bolstered his reputation further by disposing of hoary myths, stressing the central role of the vernacular language in religion, and imprinting on the mind pithy sayings such as the description of Reformation historiography as 'the dog that hasn't barked' and the depiction of pre-Methodist times as 'not an age of torpor but an age of gestation'.<sup>31</sup> With characteristic impatience, G. R. Elton expressed his hope that the compendium would prove to be a harbinger rather than a substitute for the proposed major study: 'The big book is eagerly awaited.'<sup>32</sup> No one in Wales doubted that the work would arrive and that it would be worth waiting for, but not until his premature retirement in 1982 was Glanmor able to devote adequate time for

<sup>30</sup> *History*, 48, no. 164 (1963), 359–60. For other complimentary reviews, see A. H. Dodd in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 112 (1963), 193–4 and T. Jones Pierce in *Welsh History Review*, 2, no. 1 (1964), 95–7.

<sup>31</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Welsh Reformation Essays* (Cardiff, 1967), pp. 11, 29.

<sup>32</sup> In his review of *Welsh Reformation Essays* in *Welsh History Review*, 4, no. 3 (1969), 306–7.

this monumental work. In the meantime, appetites were whetted by studies of Reformation historiography and of the complex but fascinating interplay between the language, religion and nationality of Wales, a trio of forces which acted as an active and powerful leaven in the lump. The sheer sweep of some of his essays was astonishing, none more so than the 30,000-word chapter, entitled 'Fire on Cambria's Altar', which was published in *The Welsh and their Religion* (1991), a remarkable analysis of the development of the Christian religion in Wales from Roman times to the modern decline in church membership. One of Glanmor's chief assets was his unerring ability to see the big picture. This broad canvas was evident in his compelling account of the post-Glyndŵr era, the effects of the Acts of Union, and the opportunities presented by the Reformation and the Renaissance, all of which were major themes in the awkwardly titled *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales c.1415–1642* (1987), which was his contribution to the 'History of Wales' series. Then, as promised, in 1997 came the culmination of scholarly work stretching over nearly half a century, the beautifully written and handsomely produced *Wales and the Reformation* (1997), the first substantial study of how the Welsh were set on the path which made them a fervid Protestant people. He was, of course, acutely aware that the Reformation in Wales was not an event but a process which came of age in the eighteenth century, but his last big book brought out very clearly the momentous significance of the 1563 Act and the ensuing translation of the Bible into Welsh in the long and arduous task of winning hearts and minds. Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that the freshness which characterised *The Welsh Church* was not replicated here, partly because Glanmor's conclusions had been rehearsed by him in earlier, shorter works and also partly because he had not been able to familiarise himself with some of the wider shifts in Reformation historiography. Yet, this eagerly awaited volume (440 printed pages by a septuagenarian) was respectfully and heartily received by his many admirers in the academic world and among the public at large.

In the space available, it is impossible to do full justice to the sheer range and quality of Glanmor's published output. Charting the *longue durée* held no terrors for him, and he could move backwards and forwards in time with apparently effortless ease. He wrote about monumental inscriptions, castle-building, prophetic myths, the Union with England, printing presses, the Welsh gentry, early Puritans and Dissenters, educational movements and patriotic sentiment in its diverse forms. His excursions into the modern period were not as rare as some have believed, and



his beautifully written early essay on the idea of nationality on Wales,<sup>33</sup> for instance, opened up new areas of research, as did his edited volume, *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working-Class Tradition* (1966). He was among the first to recognise the critical influence of the industrial revolution and radical Nonconformity in the shaping of modern Wales. Popular books like those on Owain Glyndŵr and Henry Tudor were matched by studies of David Rees, Joseph Harris (Gomer) and Samuel Roberts, Llanbryn-mair, each of which was unpretentious and readable.<sup>34</sup> A conscious stylist, he was totally at ease in addressing a popular audience as well as the scholarly community, and he had an uncanny knack of bringing fresh eyes to old problems. As his extensive bibliography reveals, not a year went by without a Welsh-language publication or review appearing under his name.<sup>35</sup> Since he always insisted that speaking or writing in Welsh did not come naturally to him, it stands greatly to his credit that he published far more Welsh-language books, articles and reviews than did many academics who had been specially appointed in other colleges to teach and publish in Welsh. He never forgot his parents' insistence that he should '*wilia Cwmbreg*' (speak Welsh) and he felt a keen sense of obligation to close friends in Departments of Welsh such as Henry Lewis, T. J. Morgan, J. E. Caerwyn Williams and Stephen J. Williams. He most certainly did not share the anti-Welsh language animus which prevailed in several Welsh colleges and he treated Richard Cobb's judgement on scholarly publishing through the medium of Welsh as 'a foolish and wasteful exercise undertaken by second-rate minds' with the contempt it deserved.<sup>36</sup> Glanmor's Welsh-language biography of Richard Davies, published in 1953, won the Ellis Griffith Prize awarded by the Board of Celtic Studies for the best scholarly work of the year.<sup>37</sup> Sixth-form pupils and university graduates had cause to be grateful for the abbreviated, but highly readable, Welsh-language version of *The*

<sup>33</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'The Idea of Nationality in Wales', *Cambridge Journal*, 7, no. 3 (1953), 145–58. See also idem, 'Seiliau Optimistiaeth y Radicaliaid yng Nghymru', *Efrydiau Athronyddol*, 15 (1952), 45–55.

<sup>34</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Owen Glendower* (Oxford, 1967); idem, *Owain Glyndŵr* (Cardiff, 1993); idem, *Harri Tudur a Chymru: Henry Tudor and Wales* (Cardiff, 1985); idem, *David Rees, Llanelli: Detholion o'i Waith* (Caerdydd, 1950); idem, 'Gomer: Sylfaenydd ein llenyddiaeth gyfnodol', *Trans. Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1982), 111–33; idem, *Samuel Roberts, Llanbryn-mair* (Caerdydd, 1950).

<sup>35</sup> For an appraisal, see Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Bachgen Bach o Ddowlais: Yr Athro Emeritws Syr Glanmor Williams', *Y Traethodydd*, 160, no. 675 (2005), 197–212.

<sup>36</sup> *Y Faner*, 4, 11, 18 Sept. 1981.

<sup>37</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Bywyd ac Amserau'r Esgob Richard Davies* (Caerdydd, 1953).

*Welsh Church* published in 1968,<sup>38</sup> while *Grym Tafodau Tân* (1984), a sparkling collection of essays designed to show how Wales bred a galaxy of preachers, poets and prose writers whose profound spiritual experiences had been expressed through the ‘power of fiery tongues’, was rewarded with a Welsh Arts Council prize for literature.<sup>39</sup> Another set of wide-ranging essays on politics and religion in *Cymru a’r Gorffennol: Côr o Leisiau* (2000) was couched in the limpid vein associated with one of his heroes, R. T. Jenkins: ‘clear to me, and clear to my readers’.<sup>40</sup> In English and in Welsh, Glanmor was a born communicator, and the enduring value of his work lies in his writings.

With characteristic selflessness, Glanmor placed his services and expertise at the disposal of many institutions and bodies within Wales and beyond. Indeed, it is remarkable that he found time to play such an active part in the public life of his country. He served the University of Wales well, spearheading the mission of the Board of Celtic Studies as its chairman for over twenty years, contributing valuably both as a member of the Management Committee and as a contributor to the pioneering research projects of the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, and regularly enriching the portfolio of the University of Wales Press. His alma mater was pleased to elect him Vice-President in 1986, an office he held for a decade. Aware of his reputation for wisdom and moderation, public bodies jostled for his services as chairman. He particularly enjoyed assuming the chairmanship of the committee of the National Folk Museum at St Fagans since its mission focused closely on the travails of common people, their social practices and beliefs. The Pantyfedwen Trust, a dispenser of charitable funds, was delighted with his performance as chairman between 1973 and 1979, while from 1978 to 1981 the Welsh Arts Council benefited enormously from his long experience of cultural initiatives. He served on the councils of the National Library of Wales, the National Museum of Wales and the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion. The Cambrian Archaeological Association elected him President in 1980. His expertise in manuscripts and love of books made him an ideal member of the board of the British Library from 1972 to 1980 and the chairman of its Advisory Council from 1979 to 1985. During this period, too, he gave unstinting service to the Advisory

<sup>38</sup> Glanmor Williams and T. M. Bassett, *Yr Eglwys yng Nghymru o’r Gonwest hyd at y Diwygiad Protestannaidd* (Caerdydd, 1968).

<sup>39</sup> Glanmor Williams, *Grym Tafodau Tân: Ysgrifau Hanesyddol ar Grefydd a Diwylliant* (Llandysul, 1984).

<sup>40</sup> Williams, *Cymru a’r Gorffennol*, p. 214.

Council of the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane. As a member of the Historic Buildings Council and of Cadw, and as chairman of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, he not only deepened his own knowledge and appreciation of the Welsh landscape and its architectural heritage but also, in the company of knowledgeable and enthusiastic experts, he actively promoted seminal research programmes. Even when the agenda was gritty and unappetising, his wise head and ‘gift of equanimity’<sup>41</sup> served him well on these occasions, though he could be extremely forthright in reminding those archaeologists, historians, lexicographers and librarians who had a record of poor delivery of their public duty.

Glanmor’s reputation as an efficient administrator and a man of vision spread into government circles. When Welsh-language issues came to the fore in the wake of the formation of the Welsh Language Society in 1962, he was one of three appointees to a commission (1963–5) which produced the celebrated Hughes Parry Report on the Legal Status of the Welsh Language. The crux of the matter was the extent to which Welsh was judged to be an appropriate medium for law and government, a vexed issue which had exercised Welsh patriots since the Acts of Union. At the time, the commission’s recommendations—that Welsh should have equal validity with English—was accepted as a practical compromise<sup>42</sup> and only with hindsight has it been viewed as an inadequate response to a complex problem. When the Welsh Language Act, which was based on the concept of ‘equal validity’, was published in 1967 it provoked a hostile response and, as Lord Prys Davies recently pointed out, its fundamental weakness was that it lacked teeth.<sup>43</sup> Relishing the controversies of these turbulent times, in 1965 Glanmor became chairman of the Broadcasting Council for Wales and a governor of the BBC. In his early days as an academic he had been a frequent broadcaster on the Welsh Home Service of the BBC and, as someone who understood the significance of the printed book, he was also deeply aware of the revolutionary effects of the modern media. Eager to act as an ambassador for Wales in what was a highly Londoncentric institution, he soon discovered that tussles for key strategic posts within the corporation resembled fights pursued under

<sup>41</sup> A phrase used by Peter Roberts, who presented him for the Cymmrodorion medal in 1991. *Trans. Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1991), 19.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, the comments of Alwyn D. Rees in ‘Statws yr Iaith Gymraeg’, *Barn*, Dec. 1965, editorial.

<sup>43</sup> Gwilym Prys Davies, ‘The Legal Status of the Welsh Language in the Twentieth Century’ in Jenkins and Williams (eds.), ‘*Let’s Do Our Best for the Ancient Tongue*’, p. 243.

bedclothes.<sup>44</sup> The Council thrived under his stewardship and he remained absolutely determined never to allow the post of Controller to fall into the hands of a non-Welsh speaker. These were volatile times in Wales and broadcasters were in a vulnerable position as the campaigns of the Free Wales Army, the Anti-Investiture Campaign Committee and the Movement for the Defence of Wales gathered strength. Glanmor especially enjoyed telling of the dressing down he received at the hands of George Thomas, an unpleasant bully who was Secretary of State for Wales at that time. Infuriated by the coverage afforded by the BBC to Welsh-language and anti-investiture protests, Thomas summoned the chairman to his office and barked: 'I'll tell the prime minister about you.'<sup>45</sup> As a long-standing, if diminutive, magistrate, Glanmor was hardly quaking in his boots and he retained his office until 1971. Mandarins in the Welsh Office became extremely fond of him and when, as founding President of the Association of History Teachers in Wales, he led a delegation to the Welsh Office in 1988 on behalf of the cause of a separate history curriculum for Wales he charmed them once more by arguing that the most expeditious way of protecting the distinctive cultural heritage of the Welsh was by appealing 'to them and their children through the medium of their long and valiant history'.<sup>46</sup> Even stony-faced public servants who were hostile to things Welsh found themselves melting in his presence.

Not surprisingly, this brilliant scholar, wordsmith, administrator and public servant was showered with richly deserved honours, all of which gave him great delight and satisfaction. He received honorary fellowships at Swansea (1988), Aberystwyth (1993) and Carmarthen (1996), and the University of Wales, which had already awarded him a D.Litt. for *The Welsh Church* in 1963, conferred upon him an honorary LL.D. in 1998. In October 1991, in the company of the Anglo-Welsh scholar Professor Gwyn Jones, and the artist Kyffin Williams, he was presented at the National Library of Wales with the coveted medal of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion. Elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 1954, he served as Vice-President from 1979 to 1983. The Society of Antiquaries elected him a Fellow in 1970 and the ultimate scholarly accolade arrived in 1986 when he was elected a Fellow of the British

<sup>44</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'Fighting under the Bed Clothes', in Patrick Hannan (ed.), *Wales in Vision: The People and Politics of Television* (BBC Wales, 1990), pp. 146–52.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, *A Life*, p. 139.

<sup>46</sup> Glanmor Williams, 'All Our Yesterdays', *Welsh Historian*, no. 11 (1989), 5.

Academy, whose section meetings he attended faithfully. The state recognised his status as an elder statesman and as the dominant figure within his profession by awarding him a CBE in 1981, and in 1995 he was raised to a knighthood 'for services to the history, culture and heritage of Wales'. Never was there a more deserving recipient. Other, more personal, tokens of gratitude moved him deeply. On his retirement, four of his colleagues edited a Festschrift in his honour, a valedictory greeting 'to salute his remarkable services to scholarly and other activities in Wales'.<sup>47</sup> But nothing gave him greater joy than to be made a freeman of the Borough of Merthyr Tydfil in 2002.

Small but solidly built, Glanmor was fortunate to remain physically healthy and active for most of his life and he was blessed with sufficient energy to keep many irons in the fire, all of which seemed to stay hot and alive. Routine was important to him, and the phrase 'Down to College early' recurs frequently in his diaries (which he presumably kept with an eye to history). He discharged his extraordinarily wide range of academic, public and social duties with conscientious care and never shirked taking painful decisions. He loved conversation, discourse and argument, and seldom failed to get his own way. Following his retirement in 1982 his intellectual energy remained undiminished, and although computers never impinged on his life, his battered typewriter was seldom allowed a moment's peace. Even though writing came easier to him than it does to most scholars, he took immense pains with his style and much drafting and fine tuning was undertaken before he declared himself satisfied. All his published writings are distinguished by clarity and elegance. He was invited to deliver a wide range of prestigious public lectures in Wales and beyond, and his inimitable high-pitched voice, which tended to move up an octave as he warmed to his theme, made his presentations all the more memorable. He was much in demand as an extra-mural lecturer, and in day-schools and conferences his discussions with mature students and sixth-form pupils kept his mind alert and sharp. After he had delivered the John Rhys Memorial Lecture in 1983, Sir Owen Chadwick, President of the British Academy, wrote to thank him warmly: 'there was not an instant, yesterday, in which my attention was not gripped'.<sup>48</sup> Late in his career he made a valuable contribution as an associate editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, just as he had done in his entries for *The*

<sup>47</sup> R. R. Davies *et al.* (eds.), *Welsh Society and Nationhood: Historical Essays presented to Glanmor Williams* (Cardiff, 1984).

<sup>48</sup> I am grateful to Lady Williams for allowing me to see a copy of this letter in Sir Glanmor Williams's private papers.

*Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (1959) over three decades earlier.

Glanmor liked people and always emphasised their qualities rather than their shortcomings. He enjoyed being with students who, for their part, found that the warmth of his friendship immediately broke down barriers. Requests for help from strangers were never left unanswered and authors, great and small, benefited enormously from his words of encouragement and his rigorous appraisal of their work. He fired the imagination of scores of amateur historians and local enthusiasts, and cared for them as if they were his own children. His great friend and colleague, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, rightly praised his 'almost prodigal readiness to assist others'.<sup>49</sup> Dr T. G. Davies, a well regarded historian of health and medicine in Wales, once estimated that at one stage Glanmor had read over a quarter of a million words on his behalf. Countless other writers have sincerely recorded in prefaces and acknowledgements their special debt of gratitude to him. His generosity of spirit was also manifest in his myriad scholarly reviews, and he served for over two decades as a conspicuously fair-minded weekly reviewer of historical and political works for the *Western Mail*. A witty man, with a lively sense of fun, he was a brilliant raconteur who possessed an exhaustible fund of anecdotes and reminiscences which he would recount with the relish of a Celtic *cyfarwydd*. His gift for parody entertained even those who were his victims, for there was no malice in Glanmor and he bore no grudges. The photograph of him which accompanies this memoir captures the wonderful twinkle in his eyes. A brisk walker, he visited the Gower and the Swansea Valley at every opportunity and marvelled at the beauty of the Welsh landscape and the variety of its natural habitats. He had an ear for classical music—Mozart and Beethoven were his favourite composers—and his home in Grosvenor Road, Sketty, rang daily to the sound of concertos, quartets, sonatas and symphonies. In the light of all these personal qualities and diverse interests, it is a relief to report that he was weak at mathematics and no great shakes as a cricketer.

Glanmor gave the outward impression of being an extrovert. Sunny, warm and gregarious, he radiated genial good humour and affability. But he was also an intensely private man, given to moods of introspection and melancholy. The unexpected death of his mother in the spring of 1970 was a grievous blow to this only child (his father had died earlier at the

<sup>49</sup> Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, 'Glanmor Williams', in Davies *et al.* (eds.), *Welsh Society and Nationhood*, p. 3.

age of sixty-one) and one from which he never truly recovered. Sleep never came easily to him and he was often assailed by bouts of pessimism and what Aneurin Bevan used to call the invasion of doubt. His Christian convictions remained strong, and the lecture which he delivered to the Welsh Baptist Union on ‘*Grym Ddoe a Gobaith Yfory*’ (Yesterday’s Power and Tomorrow’s Hope) in August 1977 offers telling insights into his religiosity.<sup>50</sup> He remained a faithful member (and a deacon) of Capel Gomer, Swansea, at a time when it felt the heat of competition from rival faiths and from Mammon. But he nursed deep misgivings about the quality of his written work and the imperfections within them, especially his Welsh-language compositions. The arrival of one of his books, fresh from the press, used to fill him with gloom. ‘I was reading through the printed work [*The Reformation in Wales*] this evening’, he wrote in September 1997, ‘and I *still* can’t make up my mind whether it’s really good.’<sup>51</sup> Although generous, perhaps overly so, in his praise to fellow historians, he was hypercritical of himself. Given his stature as the doyen of Welsh historians, such modesty and uncertainty are all the more inexplicable. In public, of course, he gave no hint of the anguish this caused him, nor indeed of the sleepless nights he spent fretting about the propensity of the Welsh to commit self-inflicted wounds or about wider issues like global poverty, the prevalence of war, and damage to the environment. There were also tensions in his mind regarding the potential conflict of interest arising from his strong attachment to a common British culture and his genuine desire, expressed implicitly in a good deal of his written work, to see the separate identity of the Welsh people flourish.

Glanmor continued to study, write and lecture until shortly before his death. His last public engagement, delivered in his eighty-fifth year, was a poignant occasion. On 7 February 2005 he travelled to Oxford to deliver a lecture at the Schools on ‘Oxford, London, Ewenni and Rome: A Tudor Welshman’s Odyssey’ to mark the retirement of his ailing former colleague, Sir Rees Davies, who, alas, passed away a few months later. It proved to be a bravura performance which drew warm and prolonged applause for this ‘smiling cherub’, as one admiring member of the audience called him. Glanmor’s own personal odyssey came to an end shortly afterwards. After a brief illness, his long, rich and fulfilling life ended on 24 February 2005. The fact that hundreds of people from all walks of life came to pay their respects at Swansea Crematorium showed that he had

<sup>50</sup> Glanmor Williams, ‘Grym Ddoe a Gobaith Yfory’, *Seren Cymru*, Aug. 1977, 61–71.

<sup>51</sup> NLW, Glanmor Williams Diaries, 8 Sept. 1997.

touched the lives of many of his countrymen. Fittingly, his ashes were scattered on the Gower in his beloved Glamorgan. His memory will be cherished by everyone who was privileged to know him and wherever the study of the history of Wales is undertaken.

GERAINT H. JENKINS

*Fellow of the Academy*

*Note.* In preparing this memoir I have been greatly assisted by personal communications, both oral and written, from Dr T. G. Davies, Professor Ralph A. Griffiths, Professor Gareth Elwyn Jones, Professor Prys Morgan, Mrs P. M. Thomas, Dr David Walker and, most of all, from Lady Williams and her children, Margaret and Huw. I am deeply grateful to them all. A volume of essays in memory of Glanmor Williams is being prepared by several of his former colleagues and pupils.







