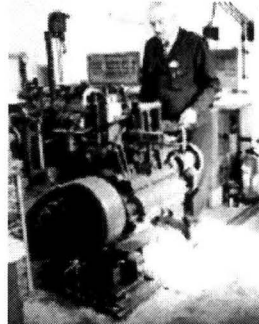


# GWAS GREGYNOG PRESS

*David Vickers*



**T**HE GREGYNOG PRESS was the brainchild of two sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret Davies. It was established in 1922 at their house, Gregynog Hall, in rural mid-Wales. During the next eighteen years the Press gained a reputation for producing limited edition books of the highest order and ranked alongside the leading private presses of the day. Re-established in 1978 under its Welsh title Gwasg Gregynog, the Press continues the traditions of its forebears, and was registered as a charity (#1090060) in January 2002. The traditional crafts of hot-metal typesetting, letterpress printing and hand-binding carried out by time-served craftsmen; illustrations by leading contemporary artists; printing on handmade and mould-made papers, and the use of the finest binding materials ensure Gwasg Gregynog books are among the best being produced by today's private presses. Whilst the intricate bindings of the specially-bound copies present a stunning visual feast, the books themselves reveal a beauty and harmony in the printed pages and are designed not only to be read, but to be a delight to all the senses.

The tradition of fine printing at Gregynog continues to this day: the use of time-honoured techniques creates a harmony of art and craft in fine book production.

Very little remained from the original press (most of which had been removed to the National Library of Wales in 1954) and today's printing is carried out on a Heidelberg Cylinder Press, although small pieces are still produced on a hand press.

The Press was commissioned to produce the inaugural document (signed by Her Majesty the Queen) for the opening of the National Assembly for Wales. In celebration of this, the first instrument of Welsh government for more than 600 years, a 250 limited edition souvenir volume was printed on Zerkall mould-made paper, hand-bound into cloth-covered boards and blocked in gold. In 2002 the press produced a limited edition volume of more than fifty linocuts by one of Wales's greatest artists, Sir Kyffin Williams, RA (which sold out three weeks after its launch), and a new translation of poems by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the birth of Johann Gutenberg, the father of printing from moveable type. Among books recently created is a range of Welsh, English and bilingual collections of poetry, celebrations of Welsh heroes and worthies, medieval sagas, and a slim volume celebrating Russia's national poet, Alexander Pushkin.

The Gregynog Press has used a variety of printing presses during its 80-year existence. The first, an Albion hand press, was used to produce two titles, but was soon superseded by the acquisition of a Victoria platen press, which achieved the same quality of printing but more quickly. The first book from the re-established Press, *Laboratories of the Spirit*, was again printed on the Albion Press (the Victoria Platen had been removed to the National Library of Wales in 1954). The next three books were printed on a hand-operated Soldans Proofmaster until the original Victoria Platen was returned on permanent loan in 1980 thus enabling faster, though still carefully controlled, production. Gwasg Gregynog acquired its present Heidelberg Cylinder Press in 1986, and apart from certain items (the National Assembly documents for example) all books since 1986 have been produced on this press. Considerations of time and money have curtailed, except in the slimmest volumes, the amount of typesetting carried out by hand. Books are currently set in metal types using the 'Monotype' system of composition, which, as its name suggests, is a method of producing single pieces of type. Traditionally, this system uses two separate machines, a keyboard and a casting machine, the former producing a perforated spool of paper that operates the latter. The keyboard and all its potential for human error is, however, eliminated at Gregynog thanks to the use of the 'Mactronic' system, where the spool is produced direct from the author's floppy disc and then the type cast in the traditional manner. Lines still need to be 'put through the stick' to maintain the Press's typographic standards, as even the best mechanical systems have their limitations.



Gwendoline and Margaret Davies