

Ben Bowen Thomas, Wales, and UNESCO.¹

W. John Morgan

Abstract

The paper considers the life and career of the prominent Welsh adult educator, civil servant, and cultural diplomat Sir Ben Bowen Thomas (1899-1977). He was born to a Christian Baptist family at Treorci, Ystrad Rhondda, Glamorgan, where his father Jonathan was a coal miner. His mother, Ann, was the sister of the poet Ben Bowen. After service in the Royal Navy, Thomas was educated at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and at Jesus College, Oxford. The paper goes on to consider Thomas' early support for Welsh nationalism, his contribution to adult education in inter-war Wales as the first Warden of Coleg Harlech. Thomas' transition to the Civil Service during the Second World War is then considered, together with his post war influence as Permanent Secretary, the Welsh Department, the Ministry of Education. Thomas' parallel career as a cultural diplomat representing the United Kingdom at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is also considered. The paper concludes with an assessment of Ben Bowen Thomas' personal contribution to Welsh society and internationally.

Introduction

Ben Bowen Thomas (1899-1977) was one of the most influential Welsh civil servants of the twentieth century. He was well-known among those in public service, but perhaps less so to the Welsh people more generally. He was an educator and civil servant, not a politician. Thomas was born in 1899 to a Welsh-speaking and Baptist family at Treorci, Ystrad Rhondda, Glamorgan, where his father was a miner.² He was educated at Rhondda Grammar School, Porth, and, after service in the Royal Navy, at University College, Aberystwyth, where he read Welsh, and later History at Jesus College, Oxford. The paper is set in the context of Welsh social service, internationalism, and intellectual cooperation of which Ben Bowen Thomas was a notable representative. These are found in the influences on his life and career: his working-class family upbringing in the Rhondda Valley as a Christian Baptist and Welsh speaker, his early commitment as an adult educator in inter-war Wales, entry to the Civil Service during the Second World War, and his post-war career as a senior member of the British governing establishment, knighted in the 1950 King's Birthday Honours List. Thomas was Permanent Secretary, of the Welsh Department, Ministry of Education (1945–63), and a cultural diplomat to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) between 1946 and 1962. He contributed to Welsh society throughout his life and was awarded the *Cymmrodorion* Medal in 1976. He was twice married, with a daughter Ann from the first of these.

¹ This is an extended version with notes of a lecture given to the *Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* on 20th April 2021. The research was supported by a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship: EM-2017-020\7. The intention was to draw upon primary sources at the National Library of Wales and at the UNESCO Library and Archive, Paris. This was frustrated by the travel restrictions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, electronic sources have been consulted, together with secondary material, in Welsh, English, French, and German.

² He was also the nephew of the controversial *bard* Ben Bowen (1878-1903) for whom he was named.

Ben Bowen Thomas as Adult Educator

A significant development after the First World War was the Ministry of Reconstruction's *Report on Adult Education* in 1919.³ Adult education should fill the gap left by the absence of public secondary education, campaign for this, and raise people's awareness of their rights and duties as citizens. This concept of adult education as a social movement was supported by progressive public intellectuals such as Archbishop William Temple, the economic historian Richard Henry Tawney, the biologist Lancelot Hogben, and the sociologist Barbara Wootton.

A prominent example from Wales was Dr Thomas Jones (1870-1955)⁴, who became an important influence on Ben Bowen Thomas. Familiarly known as 'T.J.', Jones was born at Rhymney, in what was then Monmouthshire, educated at the Lewis School, Pengam, and, after working as a clerk, at University College, Aberystwyth, and the University of Glasgow, graduating in Economics. He was, at first, an academic, in Scotland and Ireland, but became active in social affairs as secretary to the King Edward VII Welsh National Memorial Association and the Welsh National Insurance Commission. In 1914 he founded the monthly magazine *The Welsh Outlook*, through the patronage of David Davies M. P., (1880-1944), a prominent coal owner and philanthropist. Jones joined the Civil Service in 1916 and was Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, under David Lloyd George.⁵ He also had a long association with the Pilgrim Trust, as secretary, trustee, and finally Chair (1930-1954).⁶ Among his initiatives was the founding of Coleg Harlech in 1927.⁷ This was envisioned as a Welsh institution providing residential liberal adult education for 'the bright young minds' of young male working adults.⁸ It shared the philosophy of the Workers' Educational Association, of which Jones had been honorary treasurer in Wales, and countered the revolutionary ideology of the Plebs' League and the Labour Colleges movement.

It was an opportunity for Ben Bowen Thomas who had been a Tutorial Class *i.e.*, Extra-Mural lecturer at Aberystwyth since 1922. Thomas had shown his potential in *Cenadwri Copec* (COPEC's Mission), a published contribution to a conference on Christian Politics, Economics, and Citizenship (COPEC),⁹ linked to the Welsh School of Social Service.¹⁰ Of his appointment to Coleg Harlech, it is commented: 'The brightest of these young minds was Ben Bowen Thomas appointed as warden at the age of 27-so impressive an interview for the vice-warden's position that he was given the top job. Coming from the Rhondda, and unusually a card-carrying Welsh nationalist, he proved to be a charismatic and eminently suitable figurehead of an institution which saw itself as an addition to Welsh nation-building and would draw most of its students from the South Wales

³ The Ministry of Reconstruction was established in 1917 by Lloyd George's wartime coalition government to coordinate planning for post-war rebuilding. Its adult education committee was chaired by A.L. Smith, Master of Balliol College, Oxford. See F. J. Taylor (Secretary) (1976) *The Making of the 1919 Report, Studies in Adult Education*, 8:2, 134-148, DOI: 10.1080/02660830.1976.11730734.

⁴ E.L. Ellis, (1992). *T.J.: A Life of Dr Thomas Jones, CH.*: University of Wales Press, Cardiff.

⁵ He served as such under three other Prime Ministers.

⁶ *Men Without Work: A Report to the Pilgrim Trust* (1938), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, was one of its most influential publications.

⁷ See P. Stead (1977) *Coleg Harlech: The First Fifty Years*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff.

⁸ N. Evans, (2007), 'Miraculously Unfolding Possibilities: Coleg Harlech and Residential Adult Education, 1927-2007', in J. England (Ed.), *Changing Lives: Workers' Education in Wales 1907-2007*, LLafur, South Wales Miners' Library, Swansea, p. 96.

⁹ B.B. Thomas, (1924), *Cenadwri Copec, Ysgol Gwasanaeth Cymdeithasol Dros Gymru*, Wrecsam, Hughes.

¹⁰ See D.D. Morgan, 2011, *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales 1914-2000*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff (2nd Edition) for a scholarly account of Christian social service in Wales. I am grateful to Professor Mererid Hopwood for this reference.

Coalfield.¹¹ Again from another source: 'Its first warden was a Rhondda man, himself of nationalist rather than of socialist persuasion.'¹² Although he had supported the Labour Party, Thomas was a member of *Mudiad Cymreig* in 1924, one of the tiny groups that formed *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* a year later; and is listed as a member of the new party's Executive Committee in 1926.¹³ He does not seem to have been active in party politics after his appointment to Coleg Harlech, perhaps because of the influence of Dr Thomas Jones.

In an early Warden's report to Coleg Harlech's Executive Committee, Thomas described an ethos and teaching philosophy reminiscent of the Oxford tutorial system permitted by the small number of students. He said: 'Every effort has been made, not to utilise the men as receptacles of knowledge, to be passively received and contained, but, on the contrary, to train them as confident and self-reliant students. Each 'class' has commenced with an essay from one student; this has been followed by a discussion, and the so-called 'lecture' has resolved itself into an attempted criticism and synthesis of the views elicited'.¹⁴

Thomas was Warden until 1940 when he was appointed Director of Extra-Mural Studies, at University College, Aberystwyth. In that year he wrote, in what has been described as '...the most sophisticated account of the development of adult education in early twentieth-century south Wales', that the tradition and ideals of Griffith Jones and Welsh circulating schools '...were best exemplified by, and lived on in, the W.E.A.' This confirmed Thomas powerful Welsh cultural and Christian social commitment.¹⁵ In an echo of *Cenadwri Copec* (1924), he referred to Professor John Stuart Mackenzie's ethically based *Introduction to Social Reform* (1890) as having '...a profound impact on many educated young men in Wales'.¹⁶ This shows the philosophic idealism of Thomas' approach to adult education. 'Ultimately', he said. '.... the duty of the adult educationalists lies neither towards the industrial worker group nor towards his locality but to the man himself.'¹⁷ Thomas' years of Christian social service and as an adult educator, influenced by Dr Thomas Jones¹⁸, prepared him for his later career in the Civil Service.

¹¹ N. Evans, op cit. .

¹² K.O. Morgan (1982), *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1890*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 294.

¹³ See D. Hywel Davies (1983), *The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925-1945: A call to nationhood*, Palgrave Macmillan, London. I am grateful to Professor E. Wyn James for this information and reference.

¹⁴ N. Evans (2007) p. 97.

¹⁵ B.B. Thomas (1940), *Survey of Adult Education in Wales*, Cardiff. Cited in R. Lewis (1993) *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-1940*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, p. 2. The survey in fact covered the whole of Wales.

¹⁶ *Op cit.*, p.7. Mackenzie was professor of logic and social philosophy at University College, Cardiff, 1894-1915. The correct title is *An Introduction to Social Philosophy: The Shaw Fellowship Lectures at Glasgow* (1890; second edition, Glasgow, Maclehose, 1895).

¹⁷ B.B. Thomas (1929). 'Adult Education and the Industrial Worker' (substance of an address to the World Conference on Adult Education, Cambridge, August 1929), reprinted in *Welsh Outlook* (October 1929). Cited in R. Lewis (1993), p. 200.

¹⁸ See B.B. Thomas (Ed.), (1938), *Harlech Studies: Essays Presented to Dr Thomas Jones C.H.*, University of Wales Press Board, Cardiff. A collection of essays in both English and Welsh by staff and students of Coleg Harlech during the period 1927-1937, the dedication states: ' In gratitude for his service as principal founder and chairman of the college and in appreciation of his work and high example.' Also B.B. Thomas (1955), 'Thomas Jones, C.H., LL.D', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, I January 1955, p.66. National Library of Wales Digital Archives: Accessed 08/03/2021. See also E. Pryde (19) *Pilgrims : Whitehall to Wales: Dr Thomas Jones CH and Sir Ben Bowen Thomas ; two social scientists ; a memoir*, Starling Press, Newport.

Wales and Internationalism between the Wars

Another important influence was that of an idealist Kantian internationalism, supportive of the League of Nations¹⁹, notably, the example of the classicist Gilbert Murray and the International Committee for Intellectual Co-operation.²⁰ This differed from socialist working-class internationalism that saw Welsh miners support the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War.²¹ Liberal internationalism was anti-war and sometimes pacifist as shown by peace movements in Wales between 1899 and 1945, with the two World Wars providing powerful incentives.²²

David Davies, mentioned earlier, was the most cogent advocate of liberal idealist internationalism in Wales. In *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, he argued: 'We shall never get real prosperity and security until we get peace, we shall never get peace until we get justice, and we shall get none of these things until we succeed in establishing the rule of law by means of the creation of a really effective international authority equipped with those two vital institutions, an equity tribunal and an international police force.'²³ In 1919, Davies endowed the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics at University College, Aberystwyth,²⁴ and, in 1934, the Temple of Peace and Health, Cardiff. He aimed to build support in Wales for the League of Nations and the idealist concept of international relations. Thomas Jones' public career had benefitted from David Davies' patronage and their common association with David Lloyd George. Ben Bowen Thomas was, in turn, mentored by Jones and shared Davies' idealist philosophy. He also had close links as a student, tutorial class lecturer, and Director of Extra-Mural Studies, with University College, Aberystwyth, where Davies and Jones were important influences.²⁵

Thomas was also a member of the Executive Committee of the Welsh Council of the League of Nations Union (established in 1922) and of its Advisory Education Committee, with Coleg Harlech hosting meetings and residential schools. He wrote a memorandum to the Advisory Committee, probably in 1930, on the potential of links with Sunday Schools in Wales, arguing that: 'They are still a powerful factor in the life of the nation...[and that] It should be possible to include Sunday Schools in the Geneva Scholarships scheme.'²⁶ He further suggested publications in both Welsh and English on international affairs from a Christian perspective and himself published the pamphlet *Heddwch a rhyfel* (Peace and War) in 1941.²⁷

¹⁹ I. Kant (2009), *Perpetual Peace*, Penguin, London.

²⁰ W. J. Morgan (2020), 'Peace Profile: Gilbert Murray', *Peace Review*, 32 (3), 401-408.

²¹ H. Francis (2012) *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, Lawrence and Wishart, London

²² See K. O. Morgan (1981), 'Peace Movements in Wales, 1899-1945', *Welsh History Review*, 10 (3), pp. 398-430; and A. Eirug (2022), 'The Legacy of the Peace Movement in Wales 1914-1918', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, ? See also Morgan W.J. (2020) 'Pacifism or Bourgeois Pacifism? Huxley, Orwell, and Caudwell'. In: Morgan W.J., Guilherme A. (eds) *Peace and War: Historical, Philosophical, and Anthropological Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp.71-96.

²³ D. Davies (1930), *The Problem of the Twentieth Century*, Ernest Benn, Limited, London, p ?

²⁴ Sir Alfred Zimmern, the first occupant of the Woodrow Wilson Chair, was a prominent exponent of idealism in the conduct and study of international relations. This reflected David Davies' original vision. However, Edward Hallett Carr, its fourth occupant, criticised this approach, in *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919-1939: An introduction to the study of international relations*, first published in 1939, as 'liberal utopianism' There was tension between Carr and Davies throughout the former's tenure of the Wilson Chair.

²⁵ David Davies was also President of the National Library of Wales, at Aberystwyth.

²⁶ League of Nations and United Nations Association Papers, BL/48, National Library of Wales. I am grateful to Dr Stuart Booker for this reference. The Geneva Scholarships Scheme for short study visits was provided on a competitive basis by the League of Nations.

²⁷ B. B. Thomas (1940), *Heddwch a rhyfel* (Peace and war), Pamffledi Harlech, Gwasg Aberystwyth, Aberystwyth. .

Ben Bowen Thomas as Civil Servant

The Second World War saw Ben Bowen Thomas' transition from adult education to the Civil Service. In 1941 he was seconded to the Ministry of Labour and National Service in Wales beginning a career as a public servant at the late age of 42.²⁸ The Ministry was fundamental to the war effort as it directed labour among the armed forces, civil defence, and industry. Thomas, who had been on the Board of Education's Adult Education Committee (1933-1939), chaired the Swansea Manpower Board and then the Cardiff Manpower Board, until May 1945. These were responsible appointments given South Wales' industrial history and its wartime importance as a coal, iron, and steel region, with ports. He was appointed to the Board of Education's Committee on the Training of Teachers and Youth Leaders (1942-44) and its Central Advisory Council (1944-1945).²⁹ In 1945 he became Permanent Secretary, of the Welsh Department, of the new Ministry of Education, a post he was to hold until retirement in 1963. Thomas' knowledge and experience enabled him to contribute decisively both to the Welsh Department and later internationally.

On 9 April 1957, Thomas spoke to a public meeting at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, convened by the *Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* and chaired by its president Sir Wynn Wheldon. This celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Welsh Department.³⁰ He traced, with characteristic lucidity, the development of public education in Wales, reflecting on the disputes and slow progress of the inter-war years; and on post-war developments. He emphasised the Department's contribution, together with its Inspectorate, to Welsh culture and identity: the partnership with other national institutions such as the National Museum, the National Library, the University of Wales, and with volunteer organizations such as the Workers' Educational Association. Progress was made possible, he said, by the Education Act (1944) and the report of the Working Party on the Administration of Education in Wales (1947) which led to the Welsh Joint Education Committee (W.J.E.C.) in 1948. This was '...a truly democratic Welsh national body...an agent for joint action in several vital and useful fields, an invaluable instrument for clarifying educational policy and as a forum for discussing educational affairs.' He concluded: 'We, therefore, find ourselves today with a clear educational pattern within which to work.'³¹ By 1957, Ben Bowen Thomas was a powerful Welsh public servant and an influential member of the British political and Civil Service establishment.

UNESCO after the Second World War

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emerged from the efforts of the Allied Nations to create a system of international relations to replace the failed League of Nations. A conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME) met in London in 1942 to consider the construction of educational systems in support of the cultural values of human solidarity in a

²⁸ The Ministry of Labour was extended to meet the requirements of the National Service (Armed Forces) Act 1939, including the Schedule of Reserved Occupations. The National Joint Advisory Council, comprising employers' and workers' representatives, was a consultative body. Ernest Bevin, trade unionist, and Labour M.P. was the Minister during the wartime coalition government (1940-1945).

²⁹ The Board of Education became the Ministry of Education, with responsibility for England and Wales, with the Education Act (1944) that introduced secondary education for all on a tripartite basis. Its priorities were the implementation of the 1944 Education Act, including raising the school-leaving age, providing new school buildings, and meeting the urgent need for teachers through an Emergency Training Scheme for ex-service personnel, and part-time adult education through county colleges (the later colleges of further education).

³⁰ Sir Wynn Wheldon and Sir Ben Bowen Thomas (1958), 'The Welsh Department, Ministry of Education, 1907-1957: Addresses by Sir Wynn Wheldon and Sir Ben Bowen Thomas', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1 January 1958, pp.18-36. National Library of Wales Digital Archives: Accessed 08/03/2021.

³¹ *Ibid.*

post-war world. A further conference, under the auspices of the new United Nations Organization, met in London from 1-16 November 1945. Chaired by Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., the Minister of Education in the new Labour Government, forty-four countries attended. This led to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Specialized Agency of the United Nations.³²

The new organization looked to renew, but with greater commitment, the idealist approach to intellectual co-operation of the inter-war years. In one of her final speeches to the House of Commons, Ellen Wilkinson said that UNESCO'S purpose should be to maintain and develop "...standards of value ... putting aside the idea that only practical things matter."³³ Its motto, suggested by the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, became: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'³⁴ This signalled a mission to build peace through international intellectual development and cooperation. UNESCO was to have a Director-General, with a Secretariat in Paris, governed by a biennial General Conference and Executive Board of national delegations. There were also national commissions, again appointed by governments, to promote UNESCO'S policies and programmes in member countries.³⁵

However, like its parent organization, it was soon subject to the realist tensions of the Cold War and of post-colonialism. These determined the membership of UNESCO.³⁶ The Soviet Union was, at first, suspicious for ideological reasons, did not participate in the Preparatory Commission, did not join UNESCO, and discouraged its satellites and allies. It joined finally in 1954, realising UNESCO's possibilities for influencing the increasing number of post-colonial and non-aligned states in membership.³⁷ The first Director-General was the distinguished English biologist and humanist Julian Huxley. Although the Constitution stated a term of six years, Huxley was restricted to two years (1946-1948) at the insistence of the United States which was wary of his atheism and scientific humanism.³⁸

Ben Bowen Thomas as a Cultural Diplomat

In the United Kingdom, UNESCO was the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, of which Ben Bowen Thomas was a senior civil servant.³⁹ His career, educational philosophy, cultural perspective,

³² Its remit was according to the United Nations' *Charter* of 26 October 1946. There is now a very extensive literature on and by UNESCO. A brief introduction is J. P. Singh (2011), *United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): Creating norms for a complex world*, Routledge, London.

³³ H. Wilkinson, HC Deb, 22 November 1946. Vol. 430, cc1194-2301194. Other MPs, not least the Cardiff members James Callaghan and George Thomas, were less sanguine about prospects, anticipating problems given the continuing absence of the Soviet Union.

³⁴ The words 'and women' were added much later.

³⁵ The inaugural meeting of the General Conference took place in Paris on 4 November 1946.

³⁶ Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany became Members in 1951, Spain in 1953, the People's Republic of China in 1971, and the German Democratic Republic only in 1972 (until 1990). There have also been absences and withdrawals for political reasons: South Africa between 1957 and 1994, Singapore between 1986 and 2007, and, notably, the United States of America between 1985 and 2003 and again in 2018 (with Israel), and the United Kingdom between 1986 and 1997.

³⁷ J.A. Armstrong (1954), 'The Soviet Attitude to UNESCO', *International Organization*, 8 (2), pp. 217-233.

³⁸ It is now four years with the possibility of a second and final term. The post continued to be determined as much by political and diplomatic criteria as by intellectual ones.

³⁹ In 1964, the newly elected Labour Government led by Harold Wilson transferred responsibility for UNESCO to the new Ministry of Overseas Development that became the Department for International Development (DfID) in 1997. Since 2020 responsibility has been with the merged Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office.

and reputation made him well placed to contribute to UNESCO's post-war mission. A member of the United Kingdom's delegation to UNESCO from 1946, he served on the Executive Board (1954-1962) and was elected its Chair (1958-1960).⁴⁰ As such, he was a cultural diplomat promoting the foreign policy objectives of the United Kingdom and its allies during a time of Cold War, of Congressional investigations into Un-American Activities, and post-colonialism and the emergence of a Non-Aligned Movement. The United Kingdom supported Dr Luther Evans, formerly the Librarian of Congress, as Director-General (1953-1958). A year later Evans was to dismiss or not renew the contracts of seven American UNESCO employees for failure to co-operate with the United States' International Organizations Employees Loyalty Board.⁴¹ This raised fundamental questions about the role and impartiality of international civil servants.

UNESCO, now a site of Cold War and post-colonial politics, received severe criticism from the United States, for its alleged pro-Soviet and anti-Western biases. Such issues were regularly before the Executive Board during Ben Bowen Thomas' tenure. He was, however, noted for a calm and measured approach to debate and established himself as influential on the Executive Board, with the General Conference, and effective in relationships with successive Directors-General and their staff.⁴² This enabled him to contribute personally to UNESCO's mission of international intellectual cooperation and development.⁴³

He did this in at least three important ways:

First, through post-war educational reconstruction in Europe which was a priority for UNESCO, with institutes of Education (Hamburg), Youth (Munich), and Social Sciences (Cologne) in West Germany, supported by a Federal Government that wanted international contacts and recognition.⁴⁴ In 1956, an Executive Board Working Party, chaired by Thomas, was set up to appraise these institutes '...in relation to UNESCO's programme and of the prospects of their increasing their financial support from other sources in the immediately foreseeable future.'⁴⁵ In September 1957, at a joint meeting with the institutes, Thomas, together with Professor T. H. Marshall, of the UNESCO Secretariat, emphasised the need for closer coordination with UNESCO's programmes and a global perspective.

⁴⁰ Thomas continued as Permanent Secretary, the Welsh Department, Ministry of Education, until his retirement in 1963.

⁴¹ The International Organizations Employees Loyalty Board was created by a Presidential Executive order 10422 of January 9, 1953, to report on U.S. citizens working in the United Nations' system. Evans' action was reported by the well-known journalist Edward A. Morrow, (1954) 'UNESCO Head Acts on 7 Ousted Aides: Suspends Four U. S. Accused in Loyalty Cases -- Gives 3 Special Leave', *The New York Times*, December 11; For a personal account, see J. Behrstock (1987), *The Eighth Case: Troubled Times at the United Nations*, University Press of America, Lanham, New York, London.

⁴² Thomas participated in the election of another American, John W. Taylor, as Acting Director General (1952), of the Italian, Vittorio Veronese (DG, 1958), and the Frenchman, René Maheu (France) (acting DG, 1959 and DG, 1961).

⁴³ The *curriculum vitae* submitted for his election to the Executive Board stated, he had experience of adult education internationally: in Switzerland, Scandinavia, the United States of America, and Germany, (although not in post-colonial countries). General Conference, Montevideo, 8th Session, Nominations Committee, 1/11/54. 8C/NOM/16. UNESCO Archives.

⁴⁴ See also N. Pronay and K. Wilson (eds), (1985), *The Political Re-Education of Germany & Her Allies After World War II*, Croome Helm, London and Sydney, p. 92.

⁴⁵ 'UNESCO Institutes in Germany', Draft resolution by Sir Ben Bowen Thomas. Forty-first session, EB, 41 Ex/DR.7, UNESCO Archives.

Secondly, as UNESCO's membership diversified in ethnicity, language, and religion, so educational, cultural, and language issues became more sensitive.⁴⁶ Ben Bowen Thomas contributed to this debate, using the experience of the Welsh language as an example. In 1958, he published in *The UNESCO Courier* an optimistic article on 'Bilingualism: How Wales solved this great educational problem'. It described the evolution of contemporary language policy in Wales, concluding: 'And so we have both central and local government playing their part to establish as fair a bilingual policy in the schools of Wales as is possible. The result can be far-reaching. Only recently the magazine "Education" declared: "The Welsh crucible can yield results that might radically influence not only other bilingual countries but the teaching of language everywhere."' ⁴⁷ He also broadcast on 'Education in Welsh'⁴⁸ and on 'The Welsh Language'⁴⁹ for UNESCO Radio.

Thirdly, UNESCO's contribution to human rights and peace education were concerns of Thomas during his long association with the organization. On 2 December 1957, he prepared a resolution on a 'Draft Analysis of Reports of Member States on Human Rights' compiled by the Director-General's Office. This asked the General Conference to clarify the contribution it wished the Executive Board to make and: 'Invites the Director-General to communicate this document directly to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for transmission to the Commission on Human Rights, taking into account any further information which he may have received from Member States by 9 December 1957.'⁵⁰

On 14 and 29 November 1962, in an interview with UNESCO Radio and a speech to the General Conference, Ben Bowen Thomas reflected on the work of the Executive Board and of UNESCO generally. He confirmed his commitment to an idealist view of international intellectual cooperation, combined with a pragmatic call for organizational efficiency. After considering budgetary matters, he emphasized the need to put *education* '...to the forefront, as an indispensable condition of social and economic progress and for UNESCO to review structures and procedures given that organization had changed so much. He concluded: 'Where we were forty-five or forty-six countries, we are now 100 countries. And so, we have to organize a General Conference on that basis....see to it that an Executive Board is operating in close collaboration with the Director-General and his staff, and that ways and means of being equal to these quite remarkable demands and opportunities are being discovered.'⁵¹

In 1966, Thomas returned to Paris in a personal capacity, joining a Round Table discussion on *The Contribution of UNESCO to Peace*. This resulted in a *Declaration* to the 14th Session of UNESCO's General Conference, that reaffirmed, in a *preamble* of sixteen clauses and ' a solemn

⁴⁶ The official working languages are now Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

⁴⁷ *The Unesco Courier*. July 1958, p. 13.

⁴⁸ <https://digital.archives.unesco.org/en/collection/sound-recordings/detail/d43cbe18-4881-b63a-f01f-70979b570204/media/?mode=detail&view=horizontal&q=Bowen%20Thomas,%20Ben&rows=1&page=4>
Accessed: 07/04/2021.

⁴⁹ <https://digital.archives.unesco.org/en/collection/sound-recordings/detail/40cded9d-fecb-4de8-b0c3-c5b608638433/media/?mode=detail&view=horizontal&q=Bowen%20Thomas,%20Ben&rows=1&page=2>
Accessed: 07/04/2021.

⁵⁰ 49 EX/BR. 5, Paris, 2 December 1957 (Translated from the French). UNESCO Archives.

⁵¹ Ben Bowen Thomas on the Executive Board: Interview by UNESCO Radio: 14/11/1962. Accessed: 09/04/2021.

<https://digital.archives.unesco.org/en/collection/sound-recordings/detail/67f6aacd-f48e-e87f-e13f-e101b01b67de/media/?mode=detail&view=horizontal&q=Bowen%20Thomas,%20Ben&rows=1&page=1>
Opening Statement to General Conference 29/11/1962: Accessed: 09/04/2021.
<https://digital.archives.unesco.org/en/collection/sound-recordings/detail/6ca4fded-3f03-37b9-d9c7-391ce9729876/media/?mode=detail&view=horizontal&q=Bowen%20Thomas,%20Ben&rows=1&page=5>

appeal' of eight, the idealist principles of the founders. For example: 'Knowing: that a peace based exclusively upon the political and economic arrangements of governments would not be a peace which could secure the unanimous, lasting and sincere support of the peoples of the world, and that peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind.' And: 'Convinced: that peace can be secured and consolidated only if all States consent unreservedly to settle even their most serious disputes in accordance with the procedures laid down by the United Nations.' And again: 'Hoping fervently that all countries will without delay undertake complete and universal disarmament for the sake of the well-being of all peoples.'⁵² This echoed the fundamental idealism in international affairs that Ben Bowen Thomas had followed since the inter-war years.

Human rights, racialism, colonialism, poverty, economic inequality, demographic problems, the arms race, and the existential threat of nuclear war were concerns of the *Declaration*, although climate change and gender equality were not. Ironically, there were no women at the Round Table among twenty-one invited participants from fifteen countries, including three winners of the Nobel Peace Prize.⁵³ In 1975, Thomas reflected again on UNESCO and peace. Invited to join a memorial tribute to Sir Julian Huxley, the first Director-General, he commented that Huxley had accepted the limitations of his office with characteristic humour and had said '...and here I quote, that UNESCO could not produce the rabbit of political peace out of a cultural and scientific hat.'⁵⁴

Conclusion⁵⁵

On retirement, Ben Bowen Thomas contributed to public life in ways that continued his lifelong commitments. He wrote occasionally in Welsh on his UNESCO experience. In 1975, in the magazine *Y Genhinen*: 'Sir Ben said that he worked in Paris for a month in the spring (March/April), another month in July or September and a third in November/December. Between those meetings, he dealt with UNESCO problems from his office in London.'⁵⁶ This had been a considerable commitment of time by a senior civil servant. Again: 'A few weeks before his death on 26 July 1977, two further articles by Sir Ben on UNESCO were published in the Welsh weekly *Y Faner*, which argued that a major problem for the organization was inadequate funding by its member states.'⁵⁷ This was true but did not explain why funds were limited. The United States, the largest single contributor, was increasingly critical of UNESCO and its Director-General, Mr Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow (Senegal, 1974-1980).⁵⁸ It showed again the tension between idealism and realism in international affairs that

⁵² The Declaration is at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/permalink/PN-ee36d023-53d1-476a-a043-55de3329cfd6> Accessed: 08/04/2021. The Declaration was signed by all, other than Mr Sarvat Azimov, of the Soviet Union, who '...expressed reservations on certain clauses in the preamble.'

⁵³ The Nobel Peace Prize winners were Lord Boyd Orr, United Kingdom, 1949, Philip Noel-Baker, United Kingdom, 1959, and Linus Pauling, United States, 1962. There have since been two female Directors-General: Irina Bokova (Bulgaria, 2009-2017) and currently Audrey Azoulay (France, 2017-).

⁵⁴ B. B. Thomas, 5 Mai, 1975, *Julian Huxley: in memoriam*, Maison de l' UNESCO, 25.

⁵⁵ B. B. Thomas, 1941, *Braslun o hanes economaidd Cymru hyd 1914*, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, Caerdydd; B.B. Thomas, 1951, *Baledi Morgannwg*, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, Caerdydd; B.B.Thomas, 1958, *Drych y baledwr*, 1958, Gwasg Aberystwyth, Aberystwyth.

⁵⁶ *Y Genhinen*, *Gwanwyn*, 1975. Cited in G. Daniel, 1995, 'UNESCO: The contribution of Sir Ben Bowen Thomas', in W. R. Davies (Ed.) *The United Nations at Fifty: The Welsh contribution*, published on behalf of the Welsh Centre for International Affairs and the British Council, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, p. 75. Unfortunately, much of the chapter is a general account of UNESCO, dealing with events after Ben Bowen Thomas' had left the organization,

⁵⁷ 'UNESCO I a II', *Y Faner*, 10 a 17 *Mehefin* 1977. Cited in G. Daniel, *ibid*.

⁵⁸ The only African to be Director-General.

continued to be a problem for the United Nations, for UNESCO, and other United Nations Specialized Agencies.⁵⁹

Thomas was also known for his valuable contributions to Welsh history and literature, with *Braslun o hanes economaidd Cymru hyd 1914* (An Outline Economic History of Wales to 1914), *Baledi Morgannwg* (Glamorgan Ballads), and *Drych y baledwr* (The Balladeer's Mirror) examples. Such publications illustrate the multi-faceted nature of his intellectual and cultural interests.⁶⁰ This was recognized in later appointments and awards. He was President respectively of the National Institute of Adult Education, then a United Kingdom body, 1964–71; University College, Aberystwyth, 1964–76; the Baptist Union of Wales, 1966–67; and the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1969, and awarded its Medal, 1976. Thomas was elected Honorary Fellow, Jesus College, Oxford, 1963, and received an LLD (h.c.), Wales, 1965; and D. Univ (h.c.), The Open University, 1977. Importantly from a cultural perspective, he was a member of the Independent Television Authority (1964–70). Perhaps most significant politically, he served on the Royal Commission on the Constitution (1969–73) which gave impetus to devolution in the United Kingdom.⁶¹

Ben Bowen Thomas was undoubtedly one of the most influential public figures in twentieth-century Wales. A prominent adult educator and later civil servant, he had a profound effect on education policy recognising its fundamental importance for Welsh national identity within the United Kingdom. Again, Thomas' prominence as a cultural diplomat to UNESCO enabled him to contribute to global intellectual cooperation and development. In both spheres, he drew on Welsh traditions of Christian social commitment and idealist internationalism by which he had been shaped. He did so as a senior member of the British governing establishment.⁶² This needs to be noted and appreciated, especially when Ben Bowen Thomas is compared with those who are better known but were less substantial in their contribution to Welsh society.

Ben Bowen Thomas died at Bangor, Gwynedd, on 26 July 1977. He was respected for clarity of thought and expression, calmness, authority, and capacity for friendship. In a Memorial Address, at Bethel, Aberystwyth, Sir Goronwy Daniel recalled: 'He never forced his own appreciation of the truth on others but he listened to all and understood them, and then he used his great gifts to secure that agreement which permitted the greatest possible progress to be made...It is not surprising that after seeing his contribution as Chairman of UNESCO, Lord Gladwyn judged him to be one of the best of all the overseas representatives of Britain.'⁶³ Yet, said Sir Goronwy: 'Ceri Richards saw in him a deep sadness and it would indeed be surprising if such a feeling were not discernible in a man of sensitivity and lifelong hopes for the improvement of mankind.' Yet, Daniel concluded: 'He was a man who enjoyed and gave great happiness.'⁶⁴

⁵⁹ The experience of the World Health Organization during the Covid-19 pandemic is an example.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Professor E. Wyn James and to Dr Neil Evans for reminding me of this. See also R. W. Evans (Ed), 1978, *Syr Ben Bowen Thomas 1899-1977: Teyrnged*, Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru, Aberystwyth.

⁶¹ Sir Alun Talfan Davies Q.C., (1913-2000), was the other Welsh member of the Commission.

⁶² For example, on 19 February 1970, Sir Ben Bowen Thomas gave the Loyal Address at The Investiture of HRH, Charles, the Prince of Wales, Caernarfon Castle, Gwynedd.

⁶³ An Address delivered by Principal Sir Goronwy Daniel at a Memorial Service, Bethel, Aberystwyth, 2 November 1977. *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1 January 1978: National Library of Wales Digital Archives. Accessed 11/04/2021. Lord Gladwyn was the distinguished diplomat Hubert Miles Gladwyn Jebb.(1900-1996).

⁶⁴ *Op cit.*, The reference is to the painter Ceri Giraldu Richards (1903-1971). In 1964 Richards painted the portrait of Ben Bowen Thomas that is in the Aberystwyth University Museum and Galleries. The 'deep sadness' to which Richards referred may perhaps be discerned in the portrait (see below).

Author

W. John Morgan is professor emeritus, the University of Nottingham where he was also UNESCO Chair of the Political Economy of Education; honorary professor, School of Social Sciences, and Leverhulme emeritus fellow, Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, and Data, Cardiff University. He was a Commonwealth Scholarship Commissioner (2002-2008) and Chair of the United Kingdom's National Commission for UNESCO (2010-2013).



Fig.1: Sir Ben Bowen Thomas. Photograph by Walter Stoneman, 1952, with permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.