

## **Morgunbladid, Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1991.**

Walter T. Morgan  
Born 9-9-1912  
Died 29-11-1990

At the end of November, I heard about the death in Aberystwyth, Wales of Walter Thomas Morgan. A fine man, he was known to many people here in Iceland. Walter spent much time in the Eastern part of the country during the war years and his wife, who died several years ago, was from Seydisfjordur.

Walter Thomas Morgan was born on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1912 in the town of Aberdare near Cardiff in Glamorgan, South Wales. His father Isaac was a lawyer in Aberdare and there Walter finished Grammar School in 1930 and was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Wales in Cardiff. He completed a Bachelors Degree in 1933 with Honours in History, with Economics, French and Latin as secondary subjects. The following year he gained his teaching qualification. This was during the Depression and unemployment was high. Walter therefore went to London and taught History and French for a while in Bexleyheath High School. Early in 1937 he became a Research Assistant in the Department of Welsh History at the University of Wales, Cardiff and at the same time began his study of manuscripts. In mid 1938, Walter was appointed to the position of Manuscript Specialist at the Municipal Library in Cardiff where he completed a Degree in the study of ancient manuscripts. Soon, however, he was drafted and in 1941 he joined the Royal Navy which led to his link with Iceland. After the War, at the end of 1945 to be exact, he resumed his duties at the Municipal Library in Cardiff and in July 1946 he was appointed "manuscriptologist" at the Welsh National

Library in the town of Aberystwyth on Cardigan Bay in Mid-Wales. Walter worked there without interruption until the end of September 1975, when he retired, but until he died he spent much time on Historical research for his own pleasure and education. He obtained a Masters Degree in History at Cardiff in 1962 and his Thesis was on Religious Law in the Bishopric of St. David's in Wales. This thesis and many others not only on the history of religion but also in Political Science, appeared in print, but then he was a very capable writer. Walter was also knowledgeable about Economics and Sociology and was a good linguist. He spoke and wrote Welsh and English equally well was fluent in Latin and was also able to speak French, German and Icelandic when he needed to. Walter was familiar with the culture and history of several nations, had travelled to several countries and was very concerned about international relations and world peace. He always supported the United Nations and the Liberal Party in Wales and in politics his most cherished wish was that one day Proportional Representation would be adopted in Britain.

Nearly three months after Walter was called up he was posted to Iceland and came to Reykjavik in July 1941, about a year after the occupation. Thus began his ties with Iceland which were never broken. In the Navy he worked with the Coastguard usually with two or three others. Initially he was based at Hofn in Hofnafjordtur for one year. After a short leave in Britain he was posted to Vopnafjordur in August 1942 where he spent a year and a half. In Vopnafjordur he was alone for the last six weeks when that port was operative. Early in 1944 he spent a little time in Eskifjordur as the leader of a four-man guard. There Walter spent just over one year before leaving Iceland in July 1945. The last few months of his military service were spent in Scotland and at the end of 1945 he

returned to his previous job in Cardiff. During his years in Iceland Walter was not only a soldier carrying out his duties. His interest in the Icelandic language and culture, a good education and the way he presented himself led him to learn to read and speak Icelandic; he got to know several Icelanders and followed current affairs with interest. He had many good memories from four years in Iceland. So well did he adapt to life in Iceland that, for example, he became a part time teacher in Vopnafjordur teaching teenagers English for part of the Winter free of charge. When he left his students gave him a copy of Sigurdur Nordal's "Icelandic Reader 1850 – 1930", a gift that Walter always appreciated and kept in his library along with other Icelandic books. Walter's most precious memories from his years in Iceland were no doubt, his years in Seydisfjordur where his life reached a turning point.

On New Years Eve 1944 he met his wife-to-be, Dorgerdur Sigurros Johannesdottir. She was born on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1921, the daughter of Johannes Sveinsson watchmaker and his wife Elin Juliana Sveinsdottir. Walter and Gerda, as she was known, were married in Pontypridd, Glamorgan in February 1946. They spent a short time in Aberdare before moving to Aberystwyth, a beautiful town about the size of Akureyri, where Walter became Manuscriptologist at The National Library of Wales.

Gerda had started to learn English from Walter in Seydisfjordur and she quickly made many friends and acquaintances abroad. But they did not spend much time together as Gerda died of heart failure on October 6<sup>th</sup> 1950, only 29 years old. The tragic death of Gerda while she was in her prime was a big setback for him. They did not have any children and Walter grieved for his wife for the rest of his life. Gerda was apparently

a happy and clever woman, popular among her friends and acquaintances in Wales. Their wedding photograph was always on the mantelpiece in Walter's sitting room and bore witness to his love and loyalty. Ever since Gerda died Walter lived alone except for a few years when an elderly aunt lived with him. For the last twenty-five years Walter lived at 49 Portland Street, close to the shore in Aberystwyth. He enjoyed the outdoors and walked with quick and determined steps and his stocky figure could be seen walking up and down the beautiful hills and valleys. For the most part his health was good; his blindness in one eye affected him only a bit in the last ten years but his mental capacity was undiminished until the last moment. Last Autumn he had to spend some time in hospital and was recovering in a home when he suddenly died on the morning of November 29<sup>th</sup> in his 79<sup>th</sup> year. A memorial service was held in Aberystwyth but the funeral was at the place of his birth, Aberdare at the same spot as his wife forty years earlier.

Walter Morgan was one of the first people I got to know during my student years in Aberystwyth, 1966 - 1972. I had heard a little about him before I went abroad. During my first day I went up to the Library and asked for Walter, "Komdu saell og blessadur" he said and took me in his arms, the only Icelandic student in the area at the time. My family and I gained a true family friend and knowing him was always a pleasure. There were always happy times at Llanbadarn Fawr when Walter came as a guest. On New Years Eve for example, we were amused to see the children drawn to him as Walter tested our young son's knowledge of Welsh - with very good results. He would often invite us to his home or to a good hotel and the train trips he invited us on to North Wales were unforgettable. He introduced us to several friends and acquaintances who in turn became our friends. He always gave good advice. Various

other Icelanders benefited from Walter's hospitality and he was particularly warm towards the relatives and friends of Gerda. He would often mention his pleasant trip to Iceland in the Summer of 1959 when he visited several friends and acquaintances. He always followed what was happening in the Icelandic economy; he read reports from the O.E.C.D. and was familiar with many Icelandic politicians both living and dead.

When we parted in the summer of 1972, we corresponded regularly usually two or three times a year. Walter wrote in English but insisted that I wrote in Icelandic because he wanted to maintain his knowledge of the language. I always looked forward to his letters. I managed to visit him three times in Aberystwyth, once in London and a few times we spoke on the telephone when I was passing through the British Isles but did not have time to visit the areas I knew in the west by the Cardigan Bay. All these encounters were both educational and beneficial as Walter had a great depth of knowledge. His grandfather in Aberdare had managed the local Co-op and Walter was always a true follower of the co-operative movement. He was not fond of the ruthless market philosophy, which is now gaining in popularity. In the last letter I received from Walter, last autumn, he particularly mentioned the environment in the light of increasing pollution and mentioned ideas to ease the problems. He was always well-versed in current affairs although he was becoming older. He was a realist who always tried to look at the brighter sides of life. He was a good example to others with his self-sufficiency and modesty and exemplary character. I was very fortunate to get to know Walter when I did and to have him as a friend. For that, my family and I are grateful and we miss him very much.

Bless the memory of this fine man.

Ólafur R. Dýrmundsson