

Centenary celebrations

for the world's oldest Department of

International Politics

The 2018/19 academic year marks the centenary year of Aberystwyth University's Department of International Politics. Established in the bitter wake of the First World War, it was the first department of its kind in the world.

Ahead of further celebrations during 2019, including the Alumni Reunion weekend this June, Director of Centenary Celebrations **Dr Jan Ruzicka** and Head of Department **Professor Richard Beardsworth** look back on the history of this world-leading centre of excellence in the study of international relations.

In November 1918, as the Great War finally ground to a halt, among the millions killed in action were more than one hundred students of the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth. A truly unique effort to commemorate their sacrifice quickly gathered pace with the support of the Old Students Association. Less than a month after the armistice, Major David Davies (the future Lord Davies of Llandinam) wrote to the President of the College with a most generous offer that would eventually make Aberystwyth the global centre of learning and research on international politics.

David Davies began his letter with the following, memorable words: 'It has occurred to my sisters and myself that the University of Wales, and the Council of the College may be willing to allow us to found a Chair of International Politics at Aberystwyth in memory of the fallen students of our university.' Members of one of the most famous families in Wales - their grandfather being the great industrialist David Davies (Former Treasurer and Vice-President of the University and major benefactor) and sisters Gwendoline and Margaret being best known for their important art collection now housed in the National Museum in Cardiff - were ready to commit as much as £20,000 (today's equivalent would be about one million pounds) towards the cause and suggested that the Chair be named in honour of the American President Woodrow Wilson.

The offer was enthusiastically accepted at the Council meeting on 13 December 1918, making the Woodrow Wilson Chair in International Politics the oldest professorship of its kind in the



A E Zimmern



Major David Davies and his sisters Gwendoline and Margaret Davies

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world and, concomitantly, marking the beginning of the first Department of International Politics in the world. A search was swiftly organised, leading to the appointment of an eminent historian and a member of the Foreign Office, Alfred Zimmern, as the first Wilson Professor. Together with lecturer Sydney Herbert, they began their tenure on 25 April 1919, delivering lectures on the burning issues of the day such as the League of Nations Covenant. Zimmern ultimately left for Cornell University in the United States and then returned to England to become a Professor of International Relations in Oxford, which finally caught up with Aberystwyth by endowing its own chair a full eleven years later.

Over the past hundred years, the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth has grown considerably, yet its core mission remains as its founders envisaged it when they stipulated 'the need for considering all the peoples of the world as one.' Towards this end, it was in their view entirely appropriate that a Welsh university should devote itself to 'the encouragement of a truer understanding of civilisation other than our own.' For as the founding memorandum between the College and the Davies family noted, 'research is universal and depends upon zeal and opportunity, and not altogether upon the place.'

Today, this internationalist mission exists both thanks to the zeal of the founders and the generations of staff and students who have come through the Department over the past century. The study of war and peace is accompanied by research and teaching in political leadership, global health and other planetary challenges, state-building, political economy, and international organisation. The Department also covers analysis of many regions of the world and is unique in placing Welsh politics in an international perspective.



International Federation of League of Nations: 1926 visit to Aberystwyth