

BARTRUM, PETER CLEMENT (1907 - 2008), scholar of Welsh genealogy

Name: Peter Clement Bartrum

Date of birth: 1907

Date of death: 2008

Spouse: Barbara Bartrum (née Spurling)

Child: Jonathan Bartrum

Parent: Kate Isabel Bartrum

Parent: Clement Osborn Bartrum

Gender: Male

Occupation: scholar of Welsh genealogy

Area of activity: History and Culture; Scholarship and Languages; Literature and Writing

Author: Michael Siddons

Peter Bartrum was born in Hampstead, north London, on 4 December 1907, the son of Clement Osborn Bartrum and his wife Kate. His father invented the Bartrum clock, now in the Science Museum in London, while his great-uncle was headmaster of Berkhamsted School. He was educated at Clifton College, Bristol, and won a maths scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford in 1926. He joined the colonial service in 1930, and his professional career was spent as a meteorologist in Bermuda and West Africa, including Sierra Leone and Nigeria. After his retirement in 1955 he worked for a time in the Meteorological Office. He married Barbara Spurling (1910-2003) in 1934, and they had one son, Jonathan.

In his own words Bartrum had 'a fundamental desire to put things in order'. This showed itself in his youth by an interest in the classification of plants. He drew up a table of his relations, and went on to Greek legends, and later to the Arthurian legends and the Mabinogion, which led him to Welsh legends and the earliest Welsh pedigrees. He started visiting the National Library at Aberystwyth, Cardiff Central Library, the British Library and other libraries, to study the earliest surviving genealogies. He found that a great deal of the early pedigrees had not been published, and that much of what had been published was inaccurate. He therefore made a systematic study of all the earliest manuscripts dealing with legendary and heroic pedigrees, comparing and editing the texts, learning to read Welsh. This led to a series of articles (1950-62), which were to form the basis of his important book *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (1966), which gathers together and edits the earliest genealogical texts, presenting them for the first time in an accessible and reliable form.

Pedigrees have always played an important role in Wales, and under Welsh law a knowledge of one's pedigree was a legal necessity. The study of the pedigrees of the Welsh princes and nobility formed part of the traditional training of the bards, and collections of such pedigrees by successive generations of bards survive from the late fifteenth century on, until the end of the bardic system, most of them unpublished. Although with the introduction of English law a knowledge of pedigrees was no longer a legal necessity, the Welsh continued to accord great importance to their pedigrees.

Bartrum found that the early pedigrees were most accurate in contemporary manuscripts, and that the earlier parts became progressively more corrupt from repeated copying. He therefore copied all the manuscripts from about 1500 on, and established the most reliable text. In 1976 the first of his two monumental collections of pedigrees was published, *Welsh Genealogies AD 300-1400* (8 vols, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, dated 1974), with nearly 1000 pages of pedigrees, and the same number of pages of indexes. The interest in the subject was greatly under-estimated, and only 100 copies were printed. It was necessary to publish a microfiche edition shortly after. One of the important features of the indexes is that references are given to the earliest manuscript sources found for each individual appearing in the pedigrees. In the introduction he explained the purpose and scope of these collections, which was to bring order to the traditional pedigrees, and to present them in as reliable a form as possible based on the older manuscripts.

He went on to compile a continuation of the pedigrees, using, as well as the later bardic collections, the important compilations made by the gentlemen-antiquarians, who succeeded the bards in the seventeenth century. His second great collection, *Welsh Genealogies AD 1400-1500*, 18 vols, was published by the National Library in 1983. This took the pedigrees only 100 years further, but was almost twice the size of the first series. As well as Welsh families which had not achieved prominence during the earlier period, it included the English and Anglo-Norman families settled in Wales, the 'Advenae', which with few exceptions were omitted in the first series. The nature of the sources of the pedigrees meant that additions and corrections were necessary, and these were published by the National Library in a series of supplements, the last of them in 2003.

Far beyond their importance for family historians, these collections quickly established themselves as an essential tool for those studying most aspects of medieval Wales. They permit the identification of individuals and their relationship, including those appearing in the records, and many of the patrons of the bards. Their importance was recognised by a

grant to the Department of Welsh at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to produce a digital version of the complete work.

The fruit of his interest in legendary and early history was his *Welsh Classical Dictionary: People and History and Legend up to about AD 1000*^[↗], published by the National Library in 1993. This was based on notes which he had made during many years, and is the result of a very wide reading, although he had not been able owing to age to visit libraries as much recently as he had done earlier. He was awarded an honorary D. Litt. by the University of Wales in 1988.

Apart from genealogy and legend his interests included mathematical problems, and as well as articles on meteorological subjects he published papers on relativity and the Null electromagnetic field, including a paper entitled 'Rotation in General Relativity with Applications to the Case of a Rotating Particle', published by the Royal Society. He was a keen musician, and he and his wife were faithful members of the church at Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, and sang together in a Bach choir.

Peter Bartrum died at Hemel Hempstead on 14 August 2008.

Author

Michael Siddons

Sources

Jonathan Bartrum, *Peter Bartrum*, *The Guardian*, 20 October 2008

'*Bartrum Project*', Aberystwyth University website, viewed Oct 2018

, *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, Series A, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Vol.284, No.1397, Feb 23, 1965, pp. 204-23

Personal knowledge

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Peter Bartrum](#)

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