

## Mr Thomas Williams OBE



The degree of Master of Economics (*honoris causa*) was conferred upon Thomas Williams, OBE BEc, Secretary of the Union from 1928 to 1960, held in the Great Hall on 15 April 1969.

### Citation

*Presented by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Emeritus Professor W M O'Neil:*

Mr Chancellor, Mr Thomas Williams was the third permanent Secretary of The Union within this University. The office was created in 1914. The first incumbent served but a short time. He died in action at the front in the First World War in 1917. His successor, who had been Acting Secretary from 1915, was appointed in 1918. He died while still in office in 1928.

Tom Williams, as we all affectionately know him, who had been Assistant Secretary since 1924, was appointed Secretary in 1928. He remained in office until his retirement in February, 1960. His thirty-six years of service as an officer of The Union and his own unusual talents enabled him to make an indelible mark on The Union.

The Union, being a democratic institution, is managed by a Board largely elected by the members. In the nature of things there is a fairly rapid turnover of membership of the Board, a fact which does not make for stability of policy. Most members of the Board, also in the nature of things, have been young, all notable no doubt for enthusiasm but only some for wisdom and business acumen. Tom Williams during his long term of office was on hand to provide continuity and any needed additional wisdom and business acumen. But he did more than that. His wide interest in all that was going on in the University and his friendly reception of all members of The Union, whether student or staff, enabled him to preserve for many years The Union as a focal point in the University.

Unfortunately during the last few years of his period as Secretary there was a substantial withdrawal from The Union of the academic staff. Tom Williams did his best to arrest this exodus but the remarkable growth of the University in size made it inevitable. As a young professor in 1941 I lunched every day in the Refectory, usually sitting at the top table at which the centre place was reserved by convention for the Vice-Chancellor. Being an incorrigible teacher of evening students, I also ate in The Union on many evenings when arrangements were rather less formal. It seemed to me that though Union Boards might come and go, Tom Williams and the minced steak pie on the evening menu would go on for ever.

Through evening studies, Tom Williams gained the degree of Bachelor of Economics in 1931. I am unaware of his ever having done any formal academic work after that date, but I am well aware that he knew what a large number of senior students and members of staff were doing: who was likely to graduate with Honours, who was neglecting their studies, who had recently published a book and what the response to it had been, who would probably never publish the book he had been talking about for years.

Tom helped the Union Board, ran The Union, banged out on the piano the melodies of *The Vicar of Bray* and *Gaudeamus Igitur* at the end of Union dinners and talked sympathetically to any member of The Union who would pause a while on whatever business or pleasure brought him to The Union. Though the very opposite of a belligerent man, Tom Williams served in both World Wars.

Mr Chancellor, I regard myself privileged to present to you Thomas Williams, Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Bachelor of Economics, and by general consent Mr Union, for admission to the degree of Master of Economics (*honoris causa*).

*From The Gazette, May 1969*