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Inklings and Danteans Alike: C.S. Lewis, Colin Hardie, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien's Participation in the Oxford Dante Society

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Abstract

This note pulls together information about the Oxford Dante Society and compiles a useful timetable of the participation of three Inklings in its activities.

Additional Keywords

Hardie, Colin; Lewis, C.S.—Knowledge of Dante; Oxford Dante Society; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Knowledge of Dante

INKLINGS AND DANTEANS ALIKE: C.S. LEWIS, COLIN HARDIE, CHARLES WILLIAMS, AND J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE OXFORD DANTE SOCIETY

JIM STOCKTON

FOUNDED ON NOVEMBER 24th, 1876, the Oxford Dante Society is a select membership, previously restricted to twelve participants, currently at sixteen, who still meet once a term to share dinner and one another's scholarly work on Dante. New members are invited to join as senior members either retire or pass on, with the succession of membership being an itinerary of some of Oxford's most noted academics. Past members include founder Dr. Edmund Moore, Principal of St. Edmund Hall, Paget Toynbee of Balliol College, Professor Cesare Folingo of Queen's College, and Cecil Grayson, Serena Professor of Italian Studies from 1958 to 1987. Amongst this company were fellow Inklings C.S. Lewis, Colin Hardie, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien. Several years ago, while visiting the Taylor Institute Library in Oxford, England, I had the opportunity to photograph the Oxford Dante Society Minutes.⁵ From these minutes I have created an index of those meetings attended by the aforementioned Inklings, where the meetings were held, who hosted the meeting, and the content covered.⁶

INDEX OF OXFORD DANTE SOCIETY MEETINGS Attended by C. S. Lewis, Colin Hardie, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien: May 25, 1937 to May 28, 1957.⁷

Key to Entries: From left to right, entries list: the Inking(s) present at the meeting, date of the meeting, college where the society met, (host), material covered or read at meeting, and significant events.⁸

⁵ I would like to thank the Taylor Institution Library for allowing me to photograph the minutes.

⁶ Oxford Dante Society Minutes: November 24, 1876—November 12, 1968, Archives at the Taylor Institution Library, Oxford, UK.

⁷ C.S. Lewis was the first of the four Inklings to join the society, on May 25, 1937. This index goes up to May 28, 1957, the day Lewis's resignation letter was accepted. Colin Hardie was a member from May 24, 1937 until his retirement in 1973. Williams was a member from May 23, 1944 until his death on May 15, 1945. Tolkien was a member from February 20, 1945 to February 15, 1955.

⁸ Near to all of the textual references made in the minutes use traditional abbreviations for Dante's works. I chose to use full titles so as to make my transcriptions of the minutes easier to follow.

- Lewis.** 5/25/37. Oriel (Frederick Maurice Powicke).⁹ Benedict Humphrey Sumner read a paper on "Dante and Michelangelo."
- Lewis.** 11/9/37. Balliol (Sumner). Clement Charles Julian Webb read a paper on "The Problem of Siger [of Barbant]." Powicke offered a note on *Monarchia*. III. 9.
- Lewis.** 2/15/38. Magdalen (Webb). John Edward Austin Jolliffe spoke about Matelda.¹⁰ Webb offered a note on *Purgatorio*. iii. 37-39.
- Lewis, Hardie.** 5/24/38. Keble (William H. V. Reade). Reade read a paper on "Virgil's incognito in the *Inferno*." Ernest Fraser Jacob spoke about *Epistolae*. III. ss. 6-8.
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/8/38. Exeter (Richard MacGillviary Dawkins). Alfred Ewert read a paper on "Dante's Theory of Language."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 5/24/39. Keble (Jolliffe). Jolliffe read a note on "*Monarchia* II. 10. 12-16. Ceasre Foligio read from *Canzoni Donna pietosa* and *in son vento* (*Canz.* II and XV in the Oxford text).
- 11/14/39. "Meeting postponed due to war."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 2/3/40. Trinity (Ewert). **Lewis** read a paper on "Dante's Use of the Simile." Foligio read from *Paradisio*. XXXIII. 40-145.
- Lewis, Hardie.** 5/28/40. Exeter (William James Entwistle). **Hardie** read two papers: "The Episoded Ulysses in *Inferno* XXVI" and "The Words 'come tu t' timmi' *Paradisio*. IX. 81." Entwistle's note on "Curial Italian" was postponed.
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/20/40. Keble (Reade). Entwistle led a discussion on "Curial Italian." Reade shared a note on "*Convivio* IV. 24, lines 1-68, especially on the reading in line 47."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 2/18/41. Magdalen (**Lewis**). Reade read a paper on "Dante and Sordello."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/25/41. Magdalen (**Hardie**). Cyril Norman Hinshelwood read a paper on "Dante and Lucretius."
- Hardie.** 6/9/42. Trinity (Hinshelwood). Reade read a paper on "The Composition of the *Vita Nuova*."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/10/42. Balliol (Sumner). Dawkins read a further note on the "Gran Veglio of *Inferno* XV. 103." Sumner read a note on "*Inferno* XXXII. 26-30."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 2/6/43. Magdalen (Webb). Reade read a short paper on "The Three Maries of *Convivio* IV. 22."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 6/1/43. Magdalen (**Lewis**). Webb read a paper on "Dante and the Axis."
- Hardie.** 11/9/43. Trinity (Ewert). Martin Cyril D' Arcy read "A Note on Dante and St. Thomas."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 2/15/44. Magdalen (**Hardie**). Due to the death of Reade, **Hardie** is elected as secretary. Charles **Williams** is nominated for membership. Powicke read a paper on "Romeo in *Paradiso* VI. 127-142."

⁹ Members' full names are given when first mentioned; after that they are referred to by surname.

¹⁰ Matilda of the *Purgatorio*.

- Lewis, Hardie, Williams.** 5/23/44. Magdalen (Powicke). Entswistle read a paper on "More Light."
- Lewis, Hardie, Williams.** 11/14/44. Magdalen (D' Arcy). **Tolkien** is mentioned as possible member. **Hardie** read a paper on "*Purgatorio* XXXI. 34."
- Lewis, Hardie, Williams.** 2/20/45. Magdalen (Entswistle). **Hardie** read a paper on "The Letter to Mordello Malasfenia and the *Canzone Amor* da obe courier d'io mio doglio."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 5/29/45. Magdalen (**Lewis**). **Williams's** death is discussed. Jacob read a paper that was noted to include "a communication on Mr. Williams's work on Dante."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 11/13/45. Wadham College (Cecil Maurice Bowra). Bowra read a paper on "Arnaut Daniel."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 2/19/46. Exeter (Dawkins). Sumner read a paper on "cio che vivo cio che e' morto well' opera di Dante."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/28/46. Trinity (Hinshelwood). Ewert read a paper entitled "Technicalities."
- Lewis, Tolkien.** 11/15/46. Merton (**Tolkien**). **Hardie** read a paper on "Virgil and Dante."
- Hardie, Tolkien.** 2/18/47. Magdalen (Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves). d'Entrèves read from "*Purgatorio*, Canto XXVII. **Hardie** read a note on Matilda."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/27/47. Wadham (Bowra). Hinselwood read a paper on "Dante's Use of Allegory."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 11/11/47. Exeter (Entswistle). **Tolkien** read a paper on "Lusinghe (*Purgatorio* I, Inf. XIII)."
- Lewis, Hardie.** 2/17/48. Balliol (Sumner). d'Entrèves read a paper on "'gratious lumen rationis' in de *Valg Elog*. I. 18."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/25/48. Magdalen (Webb). The Italian Ambassador, Duke Gallanti Scotti, read a paper on "Pietra polunis."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 2/15/49. Magdalen (**Hardie**). **Lewis** read a paper on "The Imagery of the Last Ten Cantos of the *Paradiso*." **Hardie** read a paper on "Dante and the Virgilian Bucolic."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/24/49. All Souls (Jacob). Jacob read a paper on the "Feudal Hierarchy in the *Paradiso*."
- Hardie, Tolkien.** 11/8/49. Exeter (Dawkins). Entswistle read a paper on "Quante Commedie the Epistle X to *Can Grande*."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 2/14/50. Exeter (Hinshelwood). **Hardie** read a paper on "Dante's Interpretation of Classical Mythology in the *Comedy*."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 11/8/50. Balliol (Powicke). Sumner, upon his retirement, resigns. Powicke read a paper on "The Bull Pastoralis Cusa and King Robert of Naples."
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 2/13/51. Magdalen (**Lewis**). d'Entrèves read a paper on "Dante's Political Theory I. Civitas."

- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/22/51. Wadham (Bowra). Bowra read a paper on Sordello.
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 11/13/51. Exeter (Dawkins). Prof. Ewert read a paper on “*de Vulgari Eloquentia* II. c 7.”
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/27/52. Exeter (**Tolkien**). Entswistle read a note on *Cornivious* II. iv. *Paradiso* 27, 30, 100, 114 and the letter to Can Grande 24 (on the motion of the fixed stars). d'Entrèves read *Paradiso*, Canto 33.
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/11/52. Magdalen (Webb). **Hardie** read a paper on “The Alleged Alteration of the *Vita Nova*.”
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 2/10/53. All Souls (Jacob). **Lewis** read a paper on “Statius on Dante.”
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/26/53. Magdalen (**Lewis**). d'Entrèves read from *Inferno* 28 and Minio-Palvello read *Paradiso* 3. A note was made, “It was hoped that Jolliffe or **Tolkien** would read a paper.”
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 2/16/54. Trinity (Ewert). Lorenzo Minio-Palvello read a paper on “The Philosophical Background of the *Monarchia*.”
- Lewis, Hardie, Tolkien.** 5/25/54. Keble (Jolliffe). It was noted that Jolliffe was retiring and resigning from the society. d'Entrèves read from *Purgatorio* VIII. Minio-Paluello read V. N. c23 to the end of Canzone “Donna Pietosa.”
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/9/54. Balliol (Richard William Southern). **Hardie** presented as a communication the Bolognese Sinoventese of 1276 in which a velbro [?] with Montebello peltro is invoked as the Sanirosia of the Ghibellines in Raigad, and drew attention to Charlemagne’s two dreams of help from “Veltre’s’ in the Chanson de Roland.” A note was made that “The Secretary was instructed to invite Professor **Tolkien** to read a paper.”
- Hardie.** 2/15/55. Exeter (Hinshelwood). It was noted that **Tolkien** had resigned from the society. **Hardie** read a paper on Ile 575.
- Lewis.** 5/24/55. Oriel (Minio-Paluello). d'Entrèves and Minio-Paluello read from Canti of the *Comedy*.
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/8/55. Magdalen (d'Entrèves). **Hardie** read a paper on “Caciapuedies Prophecy in *Paradiso* XVII.”
- Hardie.** 2/14/56. All Souls (Jacob). Jacob read a paper on the Society in 1924.¹¹
- Lewis, Hardie.** 5/22/56. All Souls (Jean Seznec). **Hardie** read a paper on *Inferno* VII, 1. Satan Pape Satan Aleffe. d'Entrèves read from Par. VIII. Minio-Paluello read from *Purgatorio* VI.
- Lewis, Hardie.** 11/13/56. Magdalen (**Lewis**). **Hardie** read a note on “Trajai and the Widow: Variation on a elastic theme with illustrations.”
- Hardie.** 5/28/57. Magdalen (**Hardie**). The minutes offer the following statement on **Lewis**’s resignation: “A letter from Professor Lewis was read, in which he offered his resignation from the Society since he would not be able to attend

¹¹ The minutes don’t offer any indication to the content of Jacob’s paper. It is my assumption that the paper was on the Dante Society.

any meetings in the foreseeable future. The Society voted to keep Professor Lewis' membership in abeyance in expectation of his eventual return to active membership." Cecil Grayson read a paper on *Inferno* i. 26. **Hardie** read from *Purgatorio* XXVII. 42.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF MEMBERS (other than Lewis, Hardie, Williams, and Tolkien) mentioned in the summaries above:

Sir Cecil Maurice Bowra (1898-1971). Classical and literary scholar. 1922-38 Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, 1922-38.

Father Martin Cyril D'Arcy, Society of Jesus (1888-1976). Lecturer in Philosophy at Campion Hall, Oxford from 1927-33, and Master of Campion Hall from 1933-45. Provincial of the English Jesuits from 1945-50 (Farm Street, London).

Professor Richard MacGillivray Dawkins (1871-1955). Archeologist and scholar of Ancient Greek. Appointed University of Oxford Chair of Byzantine and Modern Greek in 1920. A Fellow of Exeter College from 1922 to his retirement in 1939.

Professor Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves (1902-1985). d'Entrèves obtained a doctorate in Medieval Political Thought in 1932. Serena Professor of Italian at Oxford from 1946-57.

William James Entwistle (1895-1952). Professor of Spanish in Glasgow from 1925-1932. King Alfonso Chair of Hispanic Studies at Oxford, from 1932 until his death in 1952.

Alfred Ewert (1891-1969). Starting in 1921 Ewert taught at the Taylor Institution in Oxford. From 1930-58 he was Oxford's Professor of Romance Philology and a Fellow of Trinity College.

Cesare Foligno (1878-1963). Lecturer at Queen's College and University of Oxford Serena Professor of Italian Studies. Co-founder of the periodical *Italian Studies*.

Cecil Grayson (1920-1998). Lecturer, St Edmund Hall, Oxford 1948-57; Lecturer, New College, Oxford 1954-57; Fellow, Magdalen College, Oxford 1958-87 (Emeritus); Serena Professor of Italian Studies, Oxford University 1958-87.

Sir Cyril Norman Hinshelwood (1897-1967). Chemistry Tutor at Trinity College from 1921-37. Dr. Lee's Professor of Chemistry at Oxford from 1937-64. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1954.

Ernest Fraser Jacob (1894-1971). Medieval historian and Professor of History at Manchester from 1929-44. Oxford's Chichele Professor of Modern History at All Souls College.

John Edward Austin Jolliffe (1891-1964). Medieval English historian and Fellow and Tutor of Keble, 1919-54. Oxford Lecturer of Medieval English History, 1949-55.

Lorenzo Minio-Paluello (1907-1986). Italian historian of philosophy and classical philologist. Senior Lecturer in Medieval Philosophy at Oriel College from 1948-56. He was appointed Reader in Medieval Philosophy in 1956, and from 1962-75, he was a professorial fellow.

Sir Frederick Maurice Powicke (1879-1963). Medieval historian, and from 1928-47, he was Regius Professor of History at Oxford.

William H. V. Reade (1908-1944) Tutor of Philosophy at Keble College, and secretary of the Dante Society.

Professor Jean Seznec (1905-1983). In 1929 Seznec won a place at the French Academy in Rome. In 1941 he accepted a position at Harvard, where he remained until 1949. From 1950-72 he was Marshal Foch Professor of French Literature at Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford.

Sir Richard William Southern (1912-2001). Medieval historian and Fellow of Balliol from 1937-61. Chichele Professor of Modern History at Oxford, 1969-1981. President of St. John's College from 1969-81. President of the Royal Historical Society from 1969-73.

Benedict Humphrey Sumner (1893-1951). Fellow and Tutor of History, Balliol College from 1925-44. Professor of History, Edinburgh University, 1944-45, Warden of All Souls College, Oxford 1945-51. Elected British Academy Fellow in 1945.

Professor Clement Charles Julian Webb (1865-1954). Fellow and Tutor of Philosophy at Magdalen, from 1889-1922. First Oriel Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oriel College, Oxford, from 1920-30.

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