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 Ceasare 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. 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.


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

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

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

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.

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). Benedict Humphrey Sumner read a paper on “Dante and Michelangelo.”


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 Paradiso. XXXIII. 40-145.

Lewis, Hardie. 5/28/40. Exeter (William James Entswistle). Hardie read two papers: “The Episoded Ulysses in Inferno XXVI” and “The Words ‘come tu t’ timmi’ Paradiso. 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 “The Three Marias of Convivio IV. 22.”


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. 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. 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 L, Inf. XIII).”


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 (Hinselwood). Hardie read a paper on “Dante’s Interpretation of Classical Mythology in the Comedy.”


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 Elogentia II. c 7.”


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 Saniroso 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.”

Harde. 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.


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-Pauluello 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:


**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** (1895-1969). 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.

**Ceasre Foligino** (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.


**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.


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.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


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