

Cymdeithas Gymraeg



Victoria Welsh Society

Newsletter: Hydref, Tachwedd 2008 / October, November 2008.

Board Members

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| <i>Past President</i> | Denis Brown | 250-658-8701 |
| <i>Secretary</i> | Gillian Greydanus | 250-642-2076 |
| <i>Treasurer</i> | Jen Pearson | 250-477-2548 |
| <i>Ladies' Auxiliary</i> | Myfanwy Rutherford | 250-382-9343 |

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| | Rita Miller | 250-389-0736 |
| | Helen Steinle | 250-386-7357 |

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From the Editor

Another summer has gone by and the Annual General Meeting is just past. This is the time when we look forward to new ideas from the new Board and the energy to embody at least some of them in action. However the viability of any organization is the responsibility of the whole body as much as those who have been appointed to guide the fortunes of the said body. This being said I urge all members to give their wholehearted support to the new board. Phone or e-mail them with your complaints, your compliments, your ideas - this is your Society, so make it work!

A letter from our new President

I was elected as the new President of the Welsh Society at the AGM on October 18th. I would like to share a few thoughts with the members. First, I would like to thank the outgoing Board of Directors. It has not been easy for the Society over the past few years. Our numbers have been declining due to a variety of factors. Margaret and I did a rough count recently and we remembered at least 30 stalwarts who have died over the years, the most recent being past president Les Richards. We are an aging society and there has been little emigration from Wales for some time. Also people may choose staying at home with television or computers rather than attend the activities of the Society.

Despite these trends we still have a viable Society and are in good shape financially. Thanks are due to Denis Brown, our president for the last three years and also to last year's Board members, Myfanwy Rutherford, Lilian Fraser, Peter Murphy, Taffy Richards, Jen Pearson, and Gill Greydanus.

Unfortunately Lilian and Taffy are not able to continue but we welcome Helen Steinle and Rita Miller back to the Board.

Our plans for the coming year include a Christmas Luncheon and the St. David's Day dinner. We are also hoping to arrange a Welsh Weekend in Victoria. (The Puget Sound Welsh Society, in Seattle, and the Vancouver Welsh Society often hold these events and they are

very successful) Helen Steinle reminded me that we have done it twice in the past, so it is our turn to do it again. We are also very keen to continue inviting Welsh choirs to Victoria and, in fact, are working on this at present. I shall keep you posted.

David Lintern

Society News

The AGM was held on October 18th, again at the CNIB building. Matters commenced at 5.30 p.m. with the business meeting, followed by dinner then entertainment in the shape of a BBC enactment of life in a Monmouthshire mining village in the 1950's. A total of 25 members attended the meeting. The make-up of the new Board is shown at the mast-head.

We are pleased to see Richard Adams back in Victoria after his time in Mongolia where he was head of the American School of Ulaanbaatar. He describes his time there in a later article in this newsletter.

Mrs. Evelyn McCaw, for many years a staunch member of this Society has left Victoria, after a spell in hospital, and is now living in Kelowna near her son. If any member wishes to write to her the Editor will furnish the address.

Glanville Jones is living in the Glengarry Nursing Home and would love a visit. Go and see him!

We were all saddened by the untimely death of Les Richards in June and we all feel for Marion in her loss.

Our Society also suffered loss in the passing of Mrs. Ethel Clark, who died in February. We are all the poorer for losing these good people.

Our website (www.victoriawelshsociety.org) is up and running again. Take a look at it if you can - you will see some familiar faces at some of our events.

The summer BBQ that Myfanwy Rutherford always hosts, was alive with people this year

but, sad to relate, not with many from our Society. The numbers were swelled by the 35 members of the Welsh Choir of Southern California who were on their way to Cobble Hill to perform in a concert at St. John the Baptist Anglican church. They sang for their supper - several pieces including "Myfanwy". A good time was had by all!

Thank you Myfanwy!

News about Wales

Are you aware that the London Welsh church that was designed by Christopher Wren is now closed. (another piece of history lost ,for all intents and purposes - Ed)

Glyndwr University in Wrexham is Wales' 10th.and newest place for higher learning. Presently it caters to 8000 students. Among other disciplines one can obtain a Master's degree in aeronautical engineering. (in my day one had to go to Bristol to get such! - Ed)

This past summer seven riders in costume retraced the path that Henry Richmond (later King Henry 7th) and his army travelled from Pembrokeshire to Bosworth Field, Leicestershire in 1485.

Carwyn Edwards, who writes a weekly newsletter from Arizona, tells us that all we've understood about Welsh and Irish ancestry is wrong. They were Basques, not Celts!

The Beijing Olympics are over but did you know that a Welshman, David Hand, from Burryport is the C.E.O of the company that managed the "Bird's Nest" stadium?

And Nicole Cook, from Wick near Bridgend, won Britain's first gold medal in a road cycling event in Beijing.

In a University of Wales publication of a study of non-conformist religion in Wales, the author says that the future of chapels consists in keeping the doors open until the last members die. This comes as the buildings are converted into pubs, night-clubs and community centres. It

appears that Wales has the highest rate of decline in religious observance in the U.K.

Recently some evidence has been uncovered to show that Lloyd-George was prepared to run in the 1945 general election if he should be unopposed. He had held his constituency of Caernarfon Boroughs since 1890. Neither the Conservative nor Labour parties would agree to his demand, so Winston Churchill persuaded him to go to the House of Lords (that L-G had always scorned) so as to have a platform from which to speak on the impending peace. He agreed, became the Earl of Dwyfor but died 3 months later.

140 years ago, on August 20th. 1868 one of the first and worst rail disasters occurred at Llanddulas, near Abergele , when the Irish Mail train ran into six runaway trucks, one loaded with kerosene. 33 people died. A memorial service was held in St. Michael's, Abergele on August 24th this year.

Llandaff Cathedral is appealing for funds to help in raising 1.5 million pounds to buy and install a new organ. The Cathedral, which stands on one of the oldest Christian sites in Britain, was badly damaged in an air-raid in 1941 but in the post-war restoration there were not enough funds to properly restore the organ and it was merely patched up. Last year it was badly damaged by lightning and is now out of use.

If you would like to contribute full information can be obtained at the website www.llandaffcathedral.org.uk.

Your donation may be made by international transfer to:

National Westminster Bank Place,
Cardiff North Branch,
21 High Street, Llandaff, Cardiff, CF5 2YT,
Wales, U.K

Sort Code : 53 - 70 – 30

Account Number : 00905984

Account Name : Llandaff Cathedral 2

Letter from Mongolia

Our former Editor, Richard Adams, spent six months this year as headmaster of a school in Mongolia. The following is an account of the time he spent there:

Mongolia - Land of the Blue Sky

There are probably not many members of the Victoria Welsh Society who can say, in Mongolian, "*I hope your cattle are fattening up nicely*". I certainly couldn't, before leaving Victoria in January 2008 to become the Principal of an international school in Ulanbaataar, the capital city of Mongolia. However, I was able to use that phrase when staying with a number of nomadic families on the fringe of the Gobi Desert during a school holidays.

An associate recruited me for the position. He suggested that leading this school, which was only in its second year of existence, would be a unique cultural opportunity. He was right. However, it was not the school, nor my living conditions, nor the city that provided the stimulus. The organization of the school was familiar in that it followed an Ontario curriculum that was taught by Canadian and American teachers; my accommodation did not present a challenge because I lived in a comfortable apartment on the school's campus; and the central city was typical of urbanization that developed in Eastern Europe some 70 years ago. The cultural jolts really came from my visits to the outskirts of the city where gers (circular felt tents called yurts in Russia) were mushrooming into sprawling encampments, and especially from my trips into the amazing and accessible countryside.

The rewards of working at the school were richly diverse. The students were industrious, energetic and wonderfully engaging. As for the teachers, they were typical of what one usually finds in international schools – confident travellers who had an amazing range of experiences in diverse countries, because they use their academic qualifications as 'tickets' to work in countries around the world.

Lingering images are strongly associated with my expeditions into the countryside. In February, I went on a trip to the Gobi Desert with a small group of much younger folk who were working with non-governmental organizations in different capacities. As we drove out of the city, I recognized the lilting Welsh accent of one of the women – she was from Ebbw Vale; the others came from the USA, Belgium and England. Mongolia attracts many such volunteers who make various contributions to this developing country whilst adventuring in challenging settings. Driving into the desert was a stimulating, indeed a bouncing experience, for there were no roads, rather were there what could be described as tendencies – these depended on which direction the driver of our Russian jeep pointed the vehicle as we headed into open, empty landscapes. We hiked sand dunes where we saw wild camels; we climbed rocky outcrops where we saw golden eagles soaring into the revered blue sky; we saw mounted herdsman directing large numbers of sheep and goats on snow covered, over-grazed steppe lands, and in the early evening we would stop at a lonely ger and simply announce to the occupants that we were staying the night. The nomadic families did not seem surprised or unduly excited by our appearance, rather did they demonstrate the famed hospitality of the rural people, who have been accepting strangers into their home through necessity rather than social obligation for centuries.



Staying with families in this setting allowed me to become acquainted with customs, dress, food and the general dynamic of living in an area where animal dung is used for fuel, where there is no electricity, running water, toilet, or space for privacy. There are no rooms in a ger, it is a round, one-room felt tent that has a minimum of furniture, a central stove, and a simple Buddhist altar on the wall opposite the door. It is the ultimate mobile home. I was usually given a seat of honour being the oldest

amongst those seated in the ger; often I was handed a knife to slice strips of cold mutton from the sheep's carcass placed in front of the altar. I participated in the ritual exchange of snuff bottles and learned that one should never back on to the altar, and also to accept graciously the ceremonial shot of vodka proffered to visitors. I slept on the floor of the gers, usually with the kids, and made sure that my feet pointed towards the door. Other trips into the countryside involved horse riding, climbing the hills up to a reconstructed Buddhist temple (Soviet stooges had systematically reduced most of them to rubble in the 1930s), being caught in a sandstorm when searching for the rare argali sheep, riding a Bactrian two-humped camel, holding a Kazakh golden eagle on my gloved hand, and watching very young boys race horses 25 kms. over open country in what seemed to be a wildly chaotic event.

Life in Ulanbaataar was not dizzyingly exciting. On the streets one sees the intermingling of traditions, with some people choosing to wear the robe-like dress called a dell, and others following very western fashion trends. Unlike other Buddhist countries in Asia, one does not note the presence of many monks or lamas, possibly because the oppression experienced during the 'Soviet years' almost eliminated all forms of religion. One unfamiliar feature of the city dynamic was being able to hitch a lift in almost any car: simply sticking out a hand would result in some driver stopping – you then jumped in and gave directions as to where you wished to go. So, I learned Mongolian for "*straight ahead, turn right, turn left, and stop*"; one was expected to pay about 30 cents a kilometre for these rides which often resulted in amusing conversations between two inadequate linguists!

The country is an amazing amalgam of ancient and modern. In rural areas traditional gers can be seen with solar panels and satellite dishes. In the city new skyscrapers rise above small bland apartments built during the Soviet times, and on the streets older people wearing dells tied with colourful sashes intermingle with youth wearing Gap knock-offs. Today, Mongolia is an independent democracy that is embracing

dramatic changes accompanying resource exploitation by multi-national firms, whilst trying to interweave its own culture with the ways of the 'western' world.

Richard Adams

In Memoriam - Dr. Leslie Richards

What do I remember about him? I first met Les in 1994. At least that's when I first became aware of him. He asked me to re-join the board as Secretary. I know that there are many of our current members who knew and worked with Les before I did and they, as I, I'm sure, succumbed to his persuasive way and the glint that was always in his eyes. Just as if he was saying "Got you!!" Who could resist? I couldn't. During his tenure as President Les was instrumental in achieving many things including the purchase of the Bardic Chair, which has now, through the efforts of Taffy Richards, been returned to Bagillt, Flintshire, its place of origin. Many of us remember Les conducting meetings, Board and AGM's, whilst sitting in that chair. Even at our monthly sing-alongs, not that he joined in the singing, he sat in the chair and held court.

Lest we forget, behind every good man is an extraordinary woman - in this case Marion, Les' wife of 58 years. To me they were an idyllic team. They travelled extensively to attend many, if not all in recent years, of the American Festival of Wales Weekends. Rita Miller and I have happy memories of those Weekends because of Les and Marion. I could go on rambling as usual but I think I hear Les telling me to "keep it short". We miss you Les!

Helen Steinle

Last Words - Geiriau Olaf

Our Society's Christmas Party – always a splendid event - will be held on December 13th.

More information to come later!