

## Pabell Cytûn, Eisteddfod Report 2015

Like all my Welsh learner F/friends we were pretty excited that the Eisteddfod was coming to Meifod, which is only about half an hour's drive from our home. In Area Meeting when the request for a coordinator was given, a long silence ensued. Looking round I could only identify one other Welsh speaker present. It's a sad fact that there are very few Welsh speakers in Mid Wales and few live near Meifod. As the clerk rose to acknowledge that no volunteer was forthcoming, I whispered to Alan that perhaps together we could manage it as hopefully my Welsh would cope and Alan had previous experience of organising volunteers to steward an exhibition of the Quaker Tapestry in the gallery of the National Theatre in London. Our offer was accepted with gratitude.

The trouble was at that stage we had no idea what we had let ourselves in for. I was very grateful to receive a note from Christine giving notice of an organising meeting locally when Ynyr Roberts explained what happens in the Pabell during the Eisteddfod week. He sought help with practical matters like acquiring chairs and tables, asking for volunteers to co-ordinate the worship service, the kitchen, and the children's corner. Ynyr usually co-ordinates the 2pm slot of presentations/ seminars on Christian topics. Likewise, people wishing to contribute music/singing at 3pm apply directly to Ynyr, plus the important matter of how to apply for free tickets.

I really didn't know the whole picture of what went on in the Pabell during the course of the week or how the whole thing was organised, so I was very much in need of Ynyr's explanation. I hadn't known how the Pabell was funded and subsequently found out that MFW's treasurer sends a contribution to the organiser to cover our share of the cost of hiring the tent and services needed like erecting it, electricity, water for the kitchen etc. There was also a need for a contribution of £150 for the cost of the tea coffee and Welsh cakes. I was very grateful that Mid-Wales AM agreed to fund this.

It was also a great relief to contact Jules Montgomery and she explained all of the work that she did. She has been an enormous help throughout. She was responsible for sending all the request forms to all the meetings, plus reminders nearer the time and the resources she had. She sent boxes of leaflets & posters, some copies of Tua'r Tarddiad and some light weight display material all ready to mount on a display board. She was also able to give me contact numbers of people who had co-ordinated the volunteers in previous years.

We had been warned the offers of help would not come in straight away, but as we got nearer the time and people had a better idea of when they were likely to go to the Eisteddfod, so we managed to cover pretty well all the spots. Alan did a sterling job as I knew he would, of keeping a record of who volunteered and when they were coming and sending out information

about when there were gaps in the schedule. It was great how people came to help and gave Alan and I a chance to see and hear some of the Eisteddfod events ourselves.

When the Eisteddfod eventually came and was all set up, it all started to be great. We were given tickets for the opening service on the Sunday morning and Helen Porter went to a special Eisteddfod Service/Mass in the Welshpool Catholic Church on our behalf.

The early part of the week was not so well attended as the weather was extremely windy and quite cold. It had been found on previous years that it was important that doors were open on both sides of the Pabell. However this caused a through draft which caused havoc to displays and piles of leaflets. Even drinks were being blown off the serving table in front of the kitchen. It was decided to close the door immediately opposite one on the other side to mitigate the through draft but the only alternative was to open the one directly into the Quiet Corner, which, of course, for the rest of the time was no longer a snug little area for a quiet retreat which was a pity. Fortunately the weather then quietened down and warmed up and the Pabell got really busy.

Two things in particular made this whole week a wonderful experience. One was having Catherine James there pretty nearly the whole time. She was my rock, guide and mentor in her unassuming way. It was lovely to get to know her better. She was there first thing in the morning and was always around at the end, and a good deal of the time in between when she wasn't taking people on a guided walk to Dolobran Meeting House. It was from her that I got to understand what we were doing by being there and the need for the Churches to be seen to be working together and not a platform for a bunch of individual churches.

The other thing I felt quietly proud to have managed was that I was invited to join in a group organised by a Methodist Minister, Jenny Heard. There were four of us plus the organist. It was a thoroughly ecumenical service with someone from the local Catholic Church, the Welshpool Welsh Chapel, our local Presbyterian Minister, myself and Jenny the Methodist Minister.

The theme for all the activities in the Pabell for the week was the Bible. The service was to last only 20 minutes and it was decided that we would speak briefly about our favourite verse from the bible and choose a hymn to complement it (only singing the first verse). It wasn't just the challenge of speaking in Welsh in front of a Welsh speaking congregation but also speaking about my spiritual belief, something I have never done before to a group of strangers.

I want to thank all the people who helped us. I have gained so much from doing this I want to say thank you for allowing me this opportunity.