

A Vision for Wales: Workshop in Aberystwyth on 19th September 2015

Report to Meeting of Friends in Wales (MFW)

Perchwch ddeddfau'r wladwriaeth ond boed eich teyrngarwch pennaf i fwriadau Duw (C&H 35)

Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes (A&Q 35)

Report by Deborah Rowlands

'A Wonderfully Vibrant and Gathered Meeting' was how Jessica Metheringham, the Britain Yearly Meeting Parliamentary Engagement Officer and one of the speakers described this event on Twitter. 25 Friends with representatives of 10 local meetings gathered on the 18th Anniversary of the 1997 referendum, when the people of Wales concluded, by a narrow majority to set up a Welsh Assembly, to consider our vision for Wales and steps we might take to get there.

Gethin Rhys, the Cytûn National Assembly Policy Officer, started proceedings by describing with pertinent examples, four ways, in order of importance, in which we can get involved with the Welsh Government. Web links for these are provided in the attached document (below).

- Get to know our local and regional Assembly Members (AMs). They like to meet and relate to people who are interested in what they do. Amongst the 5 people who are our representatives (one constituency AM and 4 regional AMs) we will find some who are keen to hear our concerns, and receive appreciation too!
- Send a Petition to the Petitions Committee. A current example is the petition from Forceswatch about visits by military personnel to schools in Wales.
- Respond to consultations from the Welsh Government. The monthly briefing, provided by Gethin (gethin@cytun.org.uk) gives details of those most likely to be relevant. The MFW Wales focus group coordinates responses for Quakers, and Quakers have a representative on the Laser Group of Church Policy officers and representatives of other bodies such as Christian Aid.
- Implementation of Legislation. It is hard to have much influence once a bill has been passed, but being aware of its possible impact may help. An example is the new 'Well-being of future generations' bill.

Elizabeth Allen, of General Meeting for Scotland described the journey which Friends in Scotland had travelled, from a recognition that they were the body to speak for Friends about Scottish Affairs to the appointment at the end of 2014 of a part-time Quaker advocacy officer for Scotland. This post is part-funded, and managed by Britain Yearly Meeting. Elizabeth spoke of the way engagement with political affairs helps to create vibrant Quaker meetings. She emphasised the need to focus on a few carefully discerned areas of concern, where Friends could speak authentically from deep experience.

During the time for questions and comments, we were reminded that Meeting of Friends in Wales has a similar authority to speak on Welsh affairs for Welsh Friends. At its last meeting, Meeting of Friends in Wales sent a Minute to Agenda Committee about **how BYM recognises the different nations within Britain appropriately**. We await the outcome. **How can we engage more Friends?** Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and Woodbrooke, acting jointly are planning to take forward the Vibrancy Initiative by a pilot project of placing some key workers in regions of Britain. One of those proposed covers part of Wales. Might this be an opportunity for us in Wales?

Jessica Metheringham, Parliamentary Engagement Officer for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) – (jessicam@quaker.org.uk, twitter is @PoliticalQuaker) explained that her role was to support Friends to engage with political action, rather than to do it on their behalf. Her role is with with elected representatives in the European Parliament and local government as well as the Westminster Government. At the moment she is particularly keen to support Friends preparing for elections in 2016: The Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament and others such as London Mayor.

Amongst the contributions which came in the worshipful session following the speakers were the following:

- *Where there is no vision the people perish* (Proverbs 29.18) – or more accurately translated – *go astray*
- Sometimes it is hard to move from where we are to what we really want. We need to pool what we have, to find the vision which will work for us.
- Wales is different: our administrator has proved a great resource for us, and working with other churches through Cytûn has proved effective and responsive to Quaker concerns.
- Politics is about how we are acting.

We started the afternoon by sharing our thoughts about what we had heard by responding to two questions:

1. What issues have been exercising your local meeting?

- Peace Education (schools)
- Trident and drones
- Refugees (housing, settlement, welcome)
- Supporting individuals and their concerns rather than organised action
- Inequality (food banks) – work with other churches
- Meeting acute need, not strategising over chronic problems
- The economy, lack of investment in Wales
- Sustainability and climate change issues

2. What are the priorities for Quakers in relation to Wales and its government?

- Scrutiny of the Assembly, including ‘future generations’ legislation and its implementation
- Addressing decline in communities, and inequality
- Celebrating Wales’s values
- Supporting AMs and civil servants – positively where possible
- Self education for effectiveness.

Next steps suggested to Meeting of Friends in Wales and Local Meetings.

- Become better informed to the Welsh dimension to issues: EG by access to Cytûn-generated material on the Assembly: *we can access Gethin Rhys’ monthly bulletin via the Cytun website. We can also circulate Gethin’s “Levels of Engagement” and notes to LMs (attached)*
- Communicate what we have found both within Wales and amongst Quakers in Britain: *Pedair Tudalen, The Friend, and using Twitter and Facebook were mentioned.*
- Engage with the 2016 elections: *Make use of Jessica Metherringham and the BYM website, and look for partners – other denominations, and more widely*
- Reflect at macro level – Where is Wales? Should we promote ‘Civic Nationalism’
- Challenge ourselves as individuals, Quakers and local communities to ask: “What sort of society do we want to live in?”; *Might we draw up a Statement to Wales, which expresses our conclusions on behalf of Friends in Wales?*

Conclusions:

It was valuable to have perspectives from outside Quakers in Wales. For Jessica, the caring welcoming community was the thread she saw weaving through contributions she had heard. Elizabeth encouraged us to celebrate, to recognise that we have what it takes to create a Society which is right for us now. Gethin Rhys reminded us of the conclusion of Gwyn Alf Williams’s BBC Wales lecture in 1979 (later expanded into a book): *When was Wales? If we want Wales, we will have to make Wales.*

Finally, we were reminded that our discussions today chime with Britain Yearly Meeting’s overarching theme of Living out our faith in the world, and the Call for Equality in Minute 36 from Yearly Meeting 2015: *We are in it for the long haul, but there are small things that we and our meetings can do: ‘being and living out the new social order, testing our leadings together and trusting to our Quaker processes, ‘opening ourselves to the Light to guide us in each small step’. (<http://old.quaker.org.uk/ym2015-minutes>)*

Sut i ymwneud â gwaith Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru a Llywodraeth Cymru

How to get involved in the work of the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Government

- a. Dod i adnabod eich Aelodau Cynulliad – etholaethol a rhanbarthol
<http://www.cynulliad.cymru/cy/memhome/Pages/memhome.aspx>
Get to know your AMs – constituency + regional –
<http://www.assembly.wales/en/memhome/Pages/memhome.aspx>
- b. Cymryd rhan mewn (neu drefnu) cyfarfodydd gydag ymgeiswyr etholiad 2016
(hyfforddiant i gadeiryddion gyda Citizens / TCC)
Participate in (or organise) hustings for 2016 election (training for chairs with Citizens / TCC)
- Deisebau – e.e. ymweliadau gan y lluoedd arfog i ysgolion (Forces Watch)
<http://www.cynulliad.cymru/cy/newhome/pages/newsitem.aspx?itemid=1473>
Petitions – e.g. armed forces visits to schools (Forces Watch)
<http://www.assembly.wales/en/newhome/Pages/newsitem.aspx?itemid=1473> [http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW/Documents/News section documents/Stop the Army Recruiting in schools.pdf](http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW/Documents/News%20section%20documents/Stop%20the%20Army%20Recruiting%20in%20schools.pdf)
- Ymgynghoriadau – llawer ohonynt – (gwaith Grŵp Laser a'r Bwletin Polisi)
<http://www.wcva.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-influence/consultations?seq.lang=cy-GB>
Consultations – many of them – (work of the Laser Group and Policy Bulletin)
<http://www.wcva.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-influence/consultations?seq.lang=en-GB>
e.e./e.g. Llywodraeth leol - Local Government
<http://llyw.cymru/consultations/localgovernment/power-to-local-people/?skip=1&lang=cy>
<http://gov.wales/consultations/localgovernment/power-to-local-people/?skip=1&lang=en>
Asedau cymunedol - Community Assets
<http://llyw.cymru/consultations/people-and-communities/protecting-community-assets-consultation/?skip=1&lang=cy>
<http://gov.wales/consultations/people-and-communities/protecting-community-assets-consultation/?lang=en>
Adnewyddu siarter y BBC - BBC Charter Renewal
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/bbc-charter-review-public-consultation>
'Datganoli' rheolau masnachu ar y Sul – 'Devolution' of Sunday trading regulations
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/devolving-sunday-trading-rules>
- Deddfwriaeth, is-ddeddfwriaeth, canllawiau statudol a chodau ymarfer, cynlluniau strategol
Primary and subordinate legislation, statutory guidance and codes of conduct, strategic plans
<http://www.cynulliad.cymru/cy/bus-home/bus-legislation/Pages/bus-legislation.aspx>
<http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/bus-legislation/Pages/bus-legislation.aspx>
e.e / e.g. Deddf Llesiant Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol 2015 - Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
<http://llyw.cymru/consultations/people-and-communities/shared-future-shared-purpose/?skip=1&lang=cy>
<http://gov.wales/consultations/people-and-communities/shared-future-shared-purpose/?lang=en>
Bil yr Amgylchedd (Cymru) – targedau newid hinsawdd; bagiau plastig...
Environment (Wales) Bill – climate change targets; plastic bags...
<http://www.senedd.cynulliad.cymru/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=12572>
<http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=12572>
Bil yr Amgylchedd Hanesyddol (Cymru) – adeiladau hanesyddol, yn cynnwys adeiladau crefyddol
Historic Environment (Wales) Bill – historic buildings, including religious buildings
<http://cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/policy/historic-places-of-worship/?skip=1&lang=en>
<http://cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/policy/historic-places-of-worship/?skip=1&lang=cy>

Parch./Revd Gethin Rhys

Swyddog Polisi'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol / National Assembly Policy Officer

Cytûn - Eglwysi Ynghyd yng Nghymru / Churches Together in Wales

58 Richmond Road, Caerdydd / Cardiff, CF24 3AT Tel: 029 2046 4378 Mudol / mobile: 07889 858062