

The Royal Welsh Show 2019 report

Quakers were represented at the Churches Together in Wales (Cytûn) pavilion, which was a large marquee in a strategic position in the heart of the show ground. The show, lasting for four days from 22 – 25 July, was as usual enormously popular with visitors from all parts of the world including Zulu warriors as well as by Prince Charles and Camilla from the UK.

The marquee mainly welcomed committed Christians, providing a generally quiet space for them to rest, enjoy conversation with the many church representatives and to quench their thirst sometime during each and every hot day. There were spaces for children and young people to play, books to buy and displays, including those of Christian Aid, The Salvation Army, The Olive Tree Project (a charity supporting Palestinians) and of course ourselves.

One Friend was usually available from the time the marquee opened until the early evening. Gordon Blackburn was there every day and Jeff Beatty gave support on 22 and 25 July and on the last day Catherine James joined us. One of us was usually to be found at one of the tables, at the display or in conversation.

Peredur Griffiths, Faith, Order and Witness Enabler, whose role was to organise the event gave space for Quaker witness. The Chaplaincy was made available for quiet worship there. There was also an act of worship each morning, with prayers, hymns, bible reading and short interpretation of the text. At one of these we were invited to read a prayer on climate change which included a plea to change human behaviour.

Altogether, the Quaker presence is welcomed in the marquee and hopefully adds value. As reported previously we do not appear to have a significant impact, but we are recognised and our traditions are accepted and discussed.

We (Gordon and I) have spoken together about our experience and we are unsure what our presence at the show adds in addition to the display of Quaker books and pamphlets in English and Welsh that is set up on the day before the show starts. These, along with those of other groups, are around the periphery of the marquee, and are seen by very few visitors, because most arrive for a rest, refreshments and to meet with chaplains. Chaplains leave the tent periodically, applying the rota previously developed and are easily seen by visitors to the show since the chaplains wear high visibility jackets. Perhaps we could join their team?

We would suggest that we ask Peredur and the organising team to develop a vision for the marquee's purpose, which may stimulate ideas for re-designing the layout at least. If it is giving space for people already committed to one faith group or another, then it works very well, if it is to provide information or for outreach, then it hardly works at all.

Those who visit shows such as this are there primarily to have enjoyable days but, in addition go to see specific events in the 'ring', to witness skills, such as sheep shearing, to meet friends and acquaintances, to do business and to visit stands with specific purposes – such as providing information about the environment, specific farming practice and even education and banking. We do not see many visiting the Church's Together tent having an appetite for researching different religious practice!! Rather they go there as a comfortable place, where there is no pressure but space to chat among family, friends and the chaplains. We do not want to proselytise, but rather ask that displays are more central enabling more opportunities to engage. We realise that the Religious Society of Friends is a very small constituent of Cytûn and we would not want to diminish our welcome and inclusion, but feel that much more could be done with more creative thinking. Peredur is open to suggestions. We welcome any that Friends wish to make.

Jeff Beatty and Gordon Blackburn