

50th Anniversary of The Stoke-On-Trent & District Welsh Society

Sefydlwyd Cymdeithas Gymraeg Stoke-on-Trent a'r cylch ar y 14eg o Dachwedd, 1967, ac i ddathlu ein pen-blwydd yn 50eg oed eleni, trefnwyd dau ddigwyddiad. Y cyntaf oedd cinio yn neuadd Keele, *{Image 1}* Prifysgol Keele, a threfnwyd ail noson i gyfuno dathliadau pen-blwydd â'r Nadolig: gan gynnwys noson o farddoniaeth, darlleniadau â chân, ar y 5ed o Ragfyr.

[The Stoke-on-Trent & District Welsh Society was founded on the 14th November 1967 and to celebrate our 50th anniversary year, two events were planned. The first was a dinner on 17th November 2017 at Keele Hall, {Image 1} Keele University & the second is a combined Christmas / Anniversary evening of song, poetry & readings on 5th December.]



Before reporting on the Anniversary Dinner, the following is a brief history of why the society was formed.

History of the Society

The North Staffordshire coalfield is almost wholly contained within the boundaries of the City of Stoke-on-Trent and the adjacent borough of Newcastle under Lyme. Welsh miners were often recruited when new mines opened in the area & others came in search of work.

The mining industry grew in the 1840's and there was a substantial influx of Welsh families. There was a strong religious aspect to their life & Welsh chapels were opened but by 1960 only one chapel remained. The meetings of the affiliated Welsh Society were held in Welsh and some members felt that it should become bi-lingual, thus allowing non-Welsh speaking family members to participate. This proposal was not adopted and so a meeting was called to see whether a bi-lingual society could be formed.

Fifty enthusiastic people attended the meeting on November 14th, 1967. Present at the first meeting was a local BBC reporter, Arfon Williams, who had been the first reporter at the scene of the Aberfan disaster in 1966.

At this time university graduates born in Wales also moved to the area to work in schools, universities & non-traditional industries such as electronics & computing.

The Society Today.

The current membership is 35 including a few non-Welsh spouses. The current chairman, John Jones, was one of the original founding members in 1967.

The monthly meetings consist of talks by guest speakers or members, quizzes, musical evenings, cheese and wine evenings etc. and usually have a Welsh theme. A St. David's Day Dinner is held as well as a Christmas Dinner.

Patriotism & hiraeth are bonds shared by our members & the majority still make regular visits to Wales.

Anniversary Dinner

The anniversary dinner was well attended by 24 members with 20 guests. The guest speaker was Rev. Parry of Wrecsam (Wrexham) & musical entertainment was provided by a local community orchestra.

Each guest & member was presented with a commemorative "picture postcard" sent from the society committee. The picture side of the postcard depicted the various locations at which the society had met & the message on the reverse side thanked them for attending the dinner. Each postcard was personalised to provide a place name at the dinner.

On display were many congratulatory letters & messages sent from other Welsh societies around the world & local organisations.

Mrs. Menai Roberts has been a member of the society for every one of the 50 years & to commemorate this the chairman announced that she would be awarded honorary membership. Menai was also presented with a bouquet of flowers ,{Image 2}.



The Rev. Robert Parry gave an interesting talk on the anniversaries of events that had shaped modern & Welsh life such as the translation of the New Testament into Welsh in 1567. He also recalled two occasions when he had met fellow Welsh people on trains. Having enquired about where they lived, he asked whether they knew about the Welsh society in that town. They both said that they did not. His conclusion was that, although it

was right to pat ourselves on the back for achieving 50 years, we should now use modern methods to make other Welsh people in the area aware of the society.

The performance of the talented local community orchestra was very well received; this included a number of hymn, festive & film scores. The orchestra was only formed in January 2016 & the chairman commented that it was fitting that they should perform at the dinner because they could well be at the start of a 50-year journey just as the society had been in 1967.

Menai Roberts proposed a vote of thanks for everyone involved in making the evening successful and especially the Rev. Robert Parry & the orchestra. She reflected that 50 years ago she little knew that she would doing this at the anniversary.

The formal proceedings closed with the members & guests singing the Welsh National Anthem, accompanied by the orchestra.

Future Thoughts

With a few exceptions, the membership of Welsh societies in the UK is gradually declining and to sustain an interest in “Welshness”, perhaps it is the internet that is going to provide easier communications between Welsh societies allowing experiences to be shared & potential new members to be contacted.