

Intensive Summer Welsh with Cymdeithas Madog (The Welsh Studies Institute in North America): A Retrospective of the 2006 and 2007 Courses

Sarah J. Stevenson

Publicity Chair/Immediate Past President of Cymdeithas Madog

Despite one of the worst heat waves on record, the 2006 *Cwrs Cymraeg y Cwm Canol* (the Central Valley Welsh Course), held in Stockton, California, was a breath of fresh air and an undeniable success. Seven tutors and nearly 55 students gathered at University of the Pacific from July 16–23, 2006, meeting old friends and new for Cymdeithas Madog's annual week of Welsh language learning.

The week began with a welcome reception sponsored by the Welsh-American Society of Northern California in the lavishly appointed President's Room. Students who had journeyed from all over the United States and Canada were able to meet one another and greet the tutors, headed by veteran lead tutor Mark Stonelake. Mark, Maldwyn Pate, and David Morgan were the contingent from Wales, while the North American teaching staff contained a number of familiar faces: Marta Diaz, Hefina Phillips, and Meredith Rehbach, along with first-time *Cwrs* tutor John Good. All the tutors offered their students numerous chances to learn and practice their Welsh throughout the week during daily language classes—punctuated, of course, by much-needed coffee breaks.

Each day students were also offered their choice of afternoon workshops in topics as varied as Reading, Background to Wales, and the *Cwrs* Newspaper. In addition, there were four post-lunch plenary sessions: an informative lecture about the Welsh founder of University of the Pacific; a panel discussion on going from Welsh learner to Welsh teacher; a slideshow about the Welsh colony in Patagonia; and a look at the history of the

Eisteddfod.

The evening activities offered the chance to socialize and practice Welsh in a more casual setting, while learning more about Welsh culture. Monday night's *twmpath dawnys*, or Folk Dance, was an excellent icebreaker. With some live musical accompaniment from tutor/musician John Good and *Cwrs* student Vivien Bosley, a little extra merriment was brought to dances such as the lively *jac-y-do*. Tuesday night consisted of a trivia quiz in the nearby Valley Brew pub, and everyone learned a few more factoids about Wales while agonizing over the challenging questions (and cheerfully accusing one another of cheating!).

On Wednesday was the mid-week field trip. Students were taken by bus to the state capital, Sacramento, where they toured the Capitol building and gardens, including a glimpse of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's office, as well as walking around historic Old Sacramento. The trip was topped off by a picnic in the shade at William Land Park, a welcome cool-down after walking around in the summer warmth. A smaller group of students opted to visit the nearby scenic ranch of Lefel 6 student Wade Dowdell, and they too reported a relaxing afternoon. Upon returning, some students joined in the Welsh Games Night and improved their Welsh skills with Bingo and Hangman, followed by an impromptu storytelling session from our resident raconteur, Ginny Grove.

Thursday night was movie night. Students gathered to watch *Mela*, a touching film in Welsh about a young girl who becomes friends with an elderly beekeeper. Friday evening was the yearly *Cwrs* Eisteddfod. Course attendees are invited to participate in one of three levels of competition in written Welsh, and prizes are awarded by our very own Gorsedd of Bards. The top honors this year went to Lefel 6 student Janis Cortese of Burbank, California, who was awarded the CM miniature eisteddfod chair to take home until next year's course. Prizes were also awarded to Diana Moller, the winner for Levels 3–5, and Myriah Williams, who

won the competition for Levels 1 and 2.

For many, the highlight of the course is Saturday evening's *Noson Lawen*, or "merry evening". Each class performed an entertaining skit, emceed by lead tutor Mark Stonelake and his collection of atrocious jokes; there were also musical performances, recitations, and two songs performed by the *Cwrs* choir, which never fails to amaze the audience with its skill after only a week of practice. The week was topped off by the Sunday morning nondenominational service in the beautiful Morris Chapel on the UOP campus.

All in all, the 30th annual *Cwrs Cymraeg* was another successful week of camaraderie and *hwyl* ("fun") thanks in no small part to local organizers Brenda Jones Belaski, Maxine Garrison, and Sarah Stevenson, and to photographer Bonnie Pavlis. Though temperatures were in the triple digits, spirits were equally high, making our annual course a memorable experience. This year's Eisteddfod winner sums it up well: "Learning about my fellow students comprised a large part of my enjoyment; there are almost as many reasons to study this sweetest of languages as there are people who study it."

In 2007, *Cwrs yr Ymerodraeth* ("the Empire Course") brought Cymdeithas Madog's annual week-long Welsh course to New York, the Empire State, for a week of language learning and *hwyl*. From July 22–29, 55 students and seven tutors converged on the campus of Sage College of Albany, New York, for an activity-packed *Cwrs Cymraeg* that garnered rave reviews from students, tutors, organizers, and campus staff alike.

Course regulars were pleased to welcome veteran *Cwrs* tutor Steve Morris from the University of Swansea as lead teacher, along with his fellow teachers from Wales, Chris Reynolds and Elwyn Hughes. The North American teaching staff included a number of familiar faces—Hefina Phillips, Kevin Rottet, Annette Evans, and Diana Manzanilla. Both Kevin and Diana were once students on the course. No doubt that fact was encouraging to many first-time attendees!

Of course, every member of the teaching staff provided encouragement throughout the week, not only in daily language classes but also during two sessions of afternoon workshops and an assortment of evening activities. *Cwrs* students sampled a variety of Welsh-related topics and activities during the workshops, such as Pronunciation Using Folk Songs, Welsh Conversation, Welsh Websites, and the *Cwrs* Choir. In the evenings, informal Welsh practice took place at events such as Monday night's *twmpath dawn*s and Tuesday evening's trivia quiz and sing-along.

On Wednesday afternoon, Garrett Riggs of the Slate Valley Museum in Granville, New York, presented a lecture with artifacts on "North Wales in New York and Vermont: the Migration and Cultural Impact of Quarrymen in the Slate Valley." A short break in the late afternoon included a tour of the city of Albany and the Hudson River.

A Welsh film was shown on Thursday evening, *Llythyrâu Ellis Williams* (The Letters of Ellis Williams), followed by our annual Eisteddfod on Friday evening. In 2007, prizes went to Jim Strickland (Levels 1 and 2), Bill Roberts (Levels 3, 4, and 5), and the winner of this year's Chair, Mary Williams-Norton. Saturday evening's *noson lawen*, or merry evening, was emceed by lead tutor Steve Morris, and featured performances by tutors and students alike.

To read more about the wonderful week we had, please read the full review on the Cymdeithas Madog website at www.madog.org/cyrsiau/llynedd/index.shtml.

Cymdeithas Madog's 2008 course, *Cwrs y Rhosyn Gwyllt* will be held July 13–20, 2008, at Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. For more information or to fill out a registration form, please visit the web site at www.madog.org.

[Portions of this review originally appeared in *Ninnau*, November 2007.]