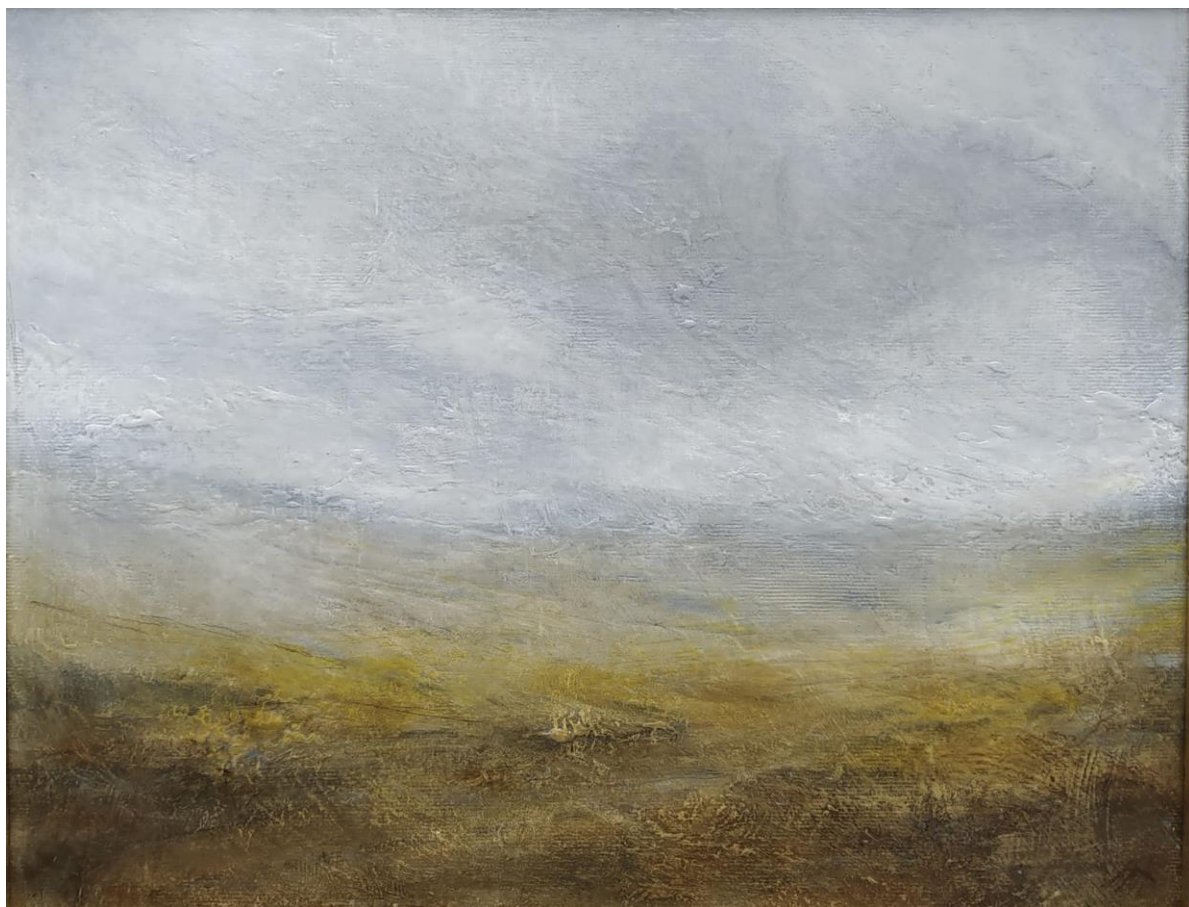


My Wales

Coming home



Rajan Madhok

Denbighshire
November 2023

Fy Nghymru

Yn dod adre



Rajan Madhok

Sir Ddinbych
Tachwedd 2023

For

Helen

Who made it all happen

&

My friends

For their hearts, hearths and hugs

&

The people of Wales especially from north-east Wales

For being here

&

The people of north-east of India

For being there

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Introduction : Croeso i Gymru

How can I call it home, I am a relative newcomer to Wales after all. Five years is not a long time especially as most of that time was spent in either Covid lockdown or our personal lockdown as Helen had a major health concern. On the other hand, may be that is what helped me to see Wales as home – a haven during tough times, surrounded by its beauty and hugged by its folk.

Fy adre

*Home, I am darling
That's how I feel in Wales
A place where I belong
Like a king, befitting my name**

*Not out of choice, but was destined
Stuff happened so could discover
What it means to be alive and loved
Darling, I am home*

*Rajan means a king in Hindi!

I came to live in North Wales under very challenging personal circumstances, when I had begun to drift. I felt doubly displaced, once when I left India, and then the future I had planned and worked for over the last four decades since coming to UK slipped away. The fate of first-generation immigrants especially as they get older is not easy anyway.

The immigrant

*Leaving on that jet plane
for the distant shores
dream come true
going to Britain
new start, new life
excited and daunted
Will I make it
Will it be worthwhile
Will I miss folk back home
Will they miss me
Fast forward four decades
neither Indian nor British
pulled by both
resentful of both
India of youth gone
Britain has changed too
Or is it me
unable to adapt
rootless and restless
the first-generation immigrant*

I wanted to find somewhere safe to recover and part of that involved understanding the place; my 'claim to fame' is that I have lived across the UK, from Shetland Islands to Isle of Wight, and over in Ireland as happened with many international medical graduates, and although I had visited Wales in the past I had not lived here. Maybe it was a case of saving the best to the last?

This is the story of what I discovered about Wales and why it is home, and how I feel about it.

Wrth fy mod yn Gymru

*Be ydy yn ystyr bod i Gymro
Ydy hi'n iaith neu crefydd
ai am fod rhywun wedi ei eni yma
Neu mae hi'n rhwybeth arall
Felly dw I'n mynd i gael gwybod
Hwn ydy'r be dw I wedi deallt
A pam dw i'n teimlo Cymro rwan
Diolch yn fawr pawb ar gyfer eich croeso cynnes*

What is Wales?

I am an eclectic and voracious reader – it is both a joy and an escape. I had in the past read books like ‘How green was my valley’ by Richard Llewellyn and Jan Morris’ ‘Epic views of a small country’, and like most of us from the Indian subcontinent watched ‘The Indian Doctor’ drama on TV about lives in South Wales, and after my arrival in Ruthin, started reading various accounts of Wales. The history has been fascinating, the plaque on the now Courthouse building in Ruthin’s Peter’s Square which marks the start of Owain Glyndwr’s campaign for independence, and the North Wales castles which are forever in your face are constant reminders of the turbulent past. And I do not have far to go to see Blaenau Ffestiniog, which has finally been granted UNESCO Heritage status (and there are two more designated sites within an hour of Ruthin) to see the important role Wales played when it supplied slates to “roof the British Empire” for example, as part of its acknowledged status as the first industrialised nation globally; and then there are many recent writings chronicling the last few decades.

However, much as I relished these accounts, I am interested in the human side, and was looking for personal stories, and especially from the ‘Outsiders’. Walking down the Ystrad Valley a few years ago, near Denbigh, I came across the monument to Dr Johnson, and decided to look him up and found this quote from him: “Wales has nothing that can excite or gratify curiosity I am glad I have seen it, though I have seen nothing because I now know that there is nothing to be seen”, or “ Boswell wants to see Wales; but except for the woods of Bach y Graig, what is there in Wales, that can fill the hunger of ignorance, or quench the thirst of curiosity?” But then, seemingly he was not an easy man to impress, as Mrs Thrale, his host who had persuaded him to come to Wales, recounted: “When we went into Wales together, and spent some time at Mr. Cotton's at Llanelwy, one day at dinner, I meant to please Mr. Johnson particularly, with a dish of very young peas. “Are not they charming?” said I to him, while he was eating them. “Perhaps they would be so —to a pig.” “This is given only as an instance of the peculiarity of his manner, and which had in it no intention to offend.” I wondered why people or the officials of Denbigh had erected a monument to him; was it to bask in his fame by associating with him? But then it was not only Johnson who found such favour in Denbigh. H M Stanley (of the Dr Livingstone, I presume fame) was another one, originally from North Wales, he denied his roots: “They cannot understand why I should not be proud of the little parish world of North Wales, and I cannot understand what they see to admire in it,” said he. His statue just outside the library in Denbigh town centre attracted a lot of attention recently when the Black Lives Matter movement was much in the news, with the petition to have it removed, but the protests died and the statue survives.

Nearly a century after Johnson, came George Borrow, who recounted his experiences of walking in Wales in 1854 in the famous and almost a required book for all walkers. His book ‘Wild Wales’ has been described as “robust, dramatic and

cheerful", and the author as "an agreeably eccentric, larger-than-life, jovial man whose laughter rings all through the book."

Though not to everyone's taste, being a bit of a show-off: "There, I said, "pray leave us to our breakfast, and the next time you feel inclined to talk nonsense about no Englishman's understanding Welsh, or knowing anything of Welsh matters, remember that it was an Englishman who told you the Welsh word for salmon, and likewise the name of the Welshman who wrote the song in which gleisiad is mentioned." - the poor illiterate Welsh women, serving at the 'Tafarn' was firmly put in her place by Borrowes. But he could also be generous: "I found my guide a first rate-walker, and a good botanist, knowing the names of all the plants and trees in Welsh. By the time we returned to Llangollen I had formed a very high opinion of him, in which I was subsequently confirmed by what I saw of him during the period of acquaintance, which was of some duration. He was very honest, disinterested, and exceedingly good humoured." High praise indeed, and totally contrary to the prevailing impression of Welshmen at the time when across the border English children were reciting the poem about Taffy, with the myth (but believed by many) about Welsh people being 'fair game' and being shot by longbow if found in Chester after sunset.

In the subsequent century came Jim Perrin: "I was a deracinated Manchester slum kid, electively Welsh, from a fractured home background, who made his way to a region where an essential connection still existed between landscape and population, between place, history, and culture, that was thrilling, absorbing and necessary for me. I was fortunate in a way that few of my then age could be fortunate these days. The fact that I had little, but interest and need, and that this was no doubt obvious, led to my being given much in the way of hospitality, information, instruction." And Wales was also the place where he returned when he was faced with the loss of his wife and son.

Life setbacks do make people start travelling – you have to go outside sometimes to go inside and deal with the loss and grief. Wales certainly helped Kiran Sidhu, when she left London after her mother's death. In her book: 'I can hear the cuckoo'; she tells of her experiences: "I never thought I could ever leave London. I love being swallowed by the city. I never imagined that one day it would spit me out." On this road less travelled, she found the hospitality and friendships, and sitting contentedly on the hill top in Wales some time later she remembers her mother: "Mum, is not this beautiful?" I said aloud, willing her to hear me. "This is where I live now. It's not forever, because nothing ever is, but it is where I am right now. It's all been rather hellish since you died. I know you won't quite believe it, and you will probably laugh, "What's a city girl like you doing in the middle of nowhere?"

But it is not always setbacks that bring people to Wales: "I first saw Dyffryn in a November gale... wild flurries of rain and mist shut out the skylines, and the steep, rocky slopes reared upward till they were swallowed by the clouds. Every now and again the clouds were rent like parted curtains, to reveal yet higher hills, from whose every hollow and gully streamed creaming water. The surface of the twin lakes was whipped into vicious white horses. Along the shores huge boulders lay scattered

haphazard, as if untidy giant children had fled for shelter, leaving their marbles where they lay.“ writes Thomas Firbank, the Canadian soldier, in his book: ‘I bought a mountain’.

“I liked that weather. I had come from two years’ imprisonment in a Canadian factory, from an atmosphere of dust and artificial humidity.”“The rain was a balm, the wind a caress, the wild Welsh mountains were an elemental purge. I think I had decided to buy even before the hood was blown away.”

His love of Welsh mountains was shared by his wife, Esme, who got the 2400 acres farm after their divorce, and who in turn became very active in the formation of Snowdonia Society with their farm becoming part of the National Park.

The theme of love of the place features in the life of other writers like June Knox-Mawer who tells her story in ‘A ram in the well’ book, and love certainly brought Whitney Brown from across the pond, who came over after meeting Jack, and the team, at the Folklife Festival at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC – this experience made her give up her studies and come over and start dry-stone walling in Wales; “Some of us have to stumble into our careers, bumping into them as we chase after something else. I was chasing sanity and love and wonder out in the hills.” she writes in her book: ‘Between stone and sky’.

Whilst outsiders may find beauty and love in Wales, life for the natives was different, and not at all easy, as depicted in the accounts of life in Wales especially in early 20th century, by writers like Caradog Pritchard and Caradoc Evans, and more locally from Denbigh, Kate Roberts. A political activist and creative writer, she has one of the placid character, in her best-seller book: ‘Feet in Chains’, Owen being convinced of.... “possibility of doing something, instead of suffering mutely. It was high time for someone to stand up against all this injustice. To do something. Thinking about it, that was the trouble with his people. They were heroic in their capacity to suffer, and not in their capacity to do something to oppose the cause of their suffering.”

The above is just a selection of some of the books but they were enough to whet my appetite and I began to wonder what exactly is Wales now and was I going to be as fortunate and find myself here?

“The pandemic was almost the last straw as lockdown meant no more Sunday gatherings at the chapel in Peniel. They used to come from all around with 12-15 cars squeezed into the small layby opposite, and the sleepy area with its remote farms used to come alive for a few hours. All that stopped and the chapel has now been sold.” It struck her very forcefully when she was speaking to Marion down the valley a few months ago who had no idea that she had undergone a yearlong treatment for breast cancer, says Helen to Cefyn as we were sitting in his studio in Ruthin Craft Centre; “...in the past the news would have spread with folk lining up with offers of help. No more community, and as the farmers age, young people are not taking up their places; why would they as it is hard work, 24/7 365 days a year with not much income.” The talk then turned to bemoaning the loss of other chapels around, and all-over North Wales, and even the churches – including the beautiful and ancient ones like Llanynys or Llanrhaeder have dwindling congregations. Was it

the usual complaints of the 'older' people, looking nostalgically at the past, and general dis-interest in religion, or is the Welsh community under threat, or indeed almost extinct as second homers have occupied many areas. What is happening to and in Wales, and what exactly does it mean to be Welsh? I had been thinking about this matter, especially since I started learning Welsh last year, and decided to further explore it. Clearly religion or language were not the defining characteristics, since Helen and Cefyn are different in these respects. Maybe it was being born in Wales? But what about those who came from outside and made it home – were they now Welsh?

I decided to learn from the lived experiences of my friends, and started talking to some of them. I asked them about their backgrounds – their upbringing, family, work etc; how they see Wales – has it changed over the years and how; and what does being Welsh mean to them – the essence of Welshness, so to speak, and to see how this has impacted on my life since I moved to Ruthin five years ago.

Be ydy'r ystyr i bod Cymro

*Cymraeg neu Saesnag
Pwy ydy'r ti
Pam wyt ti deud hynny
Deud i mi achos dw I eisiau gywbod
Os gwelwch yn dda*

The following is what I found.

The Natives: people born and brought up here

Helen (Peniel)

Helen, a painter, lives in Peniel, a small hamlet, three miles from Denbigh, having moved from Llanbedr near Ruthin, about 14 years ago. She had sold the family farm after her husband died, the financial pressures and grief, latter compounded by loss of her mother at the same time, and the need to look after her elderly father, had turned her world upside down, and she was looking for a place where she could manage her new much reduced financial status with no guaranteed income, and mental stress. "I was driving around in Denbigh area looking for a house, I did not want to stray too far from where I had lived before, with two criteria, apart from affordability: to have neighbours, but not many, and no traffic. I wanted peace and quiet, a place to recover and heal myself. I remember coming down the bend, on B4501 from the top, and the views just threw me off- looking down into the valley extending towards Denbigh Castle in the distance, and I wished, if only..... and lo and behold, as I drove down, what do I see? A house for sale- an ex-council, semi-detached, next to the chapel, which needed some work and I immediately knew I had to have it. I had found my home."

Best things happen by chance, but guess only if one is ready and she was, she says. During her intense grief period, which lasted for many years, she did the usual stuff with mindfulness and counsellors, and one day she heard an interview with Michael Caine about his film career on the radio, and where he was asked that although he had made good films, he had also made some boo boos. Why was he not more selective? His answer that struck her was that he never said no, if he could avoid it; everything was an experience and he wanted to be open to them all. That one comment changed her approach, she rejoined life and has not looked back since.

Helen and I got together just before the pandemic hit, after meeting at Cefyn's studio in Ruthin Craft Centre, and as it was easing, she got diagnosed with breast cancer, and during the treatment I also lost my mother in India with whom I used to spend a lot of time; a real humdinger of a relationship.

"My mother, unmarried, got pregnant with me, and had to be sent away to her cousin in Coedpoeth to avoid the stigma, and later on came back to her family in Ruthin," she starts. "My grandmother, would not allow them to marry and suggested that the baby girl (Helen) be put up for adoption, but mum and dad refused to consider the idea." However, they did get married when her mother got pregnant again, with her brother. Her father worked as a labourer for the Electricity Board and mother was a supervisor in the school, and Helen and her brother were brought up in a council house in Ruthin. They had an inside toilet, and the council house was great, she says, with Parquet floor, and a big garden. Her grandma's house, where she spent a lot of time, only had the outside loo, and she still remembers the chill blains. There was very little money, she always had hand me downs from cousins, and her first new frock (which was another hand me down) was when she was eight – mum thought it looked good though Helen hated it!

Helen went to local schools, was not much interested in studies but loved the school and enjoyed the sports and friendships, becoming the Head Girl at Brynhyfryd, later going to a Foundation course in Arts in Wrexham and then went off to Marseilles, France for over two years as an au pair. Various jobs later she went to study further in Liverpool and ended up staying there for four years. Missing Wales she decided to come back and at age 29 got married to Geoffery, a beef cattle farmer (not a gentleman farmer she emphasises, though he was 'posh' having been to the Leys School in Cambridge) and moved to a farm - Pen Y Waen – in Llanbedr, near Ruthin and had Simon, her son who followed her into arts, and has moved away to Liverpool and London. Geoffery's death meant Helen ended up having to sell the farm, to ensure she had enough to live on – art does not pay much, and farmers may be land rich but cash poor, she says. And that is how she ended up in Peniel.

She remembers Ruthin as a busy, happy, market town, with birds especially curlews and peacocks (latter still there in Ruthin Castle, though sadly no curlews) sounds, and beautiful Moel Famau covered with yellow gorse and purple heathers. There was a rhythm to the place – first Tuesday of the month being market day, with the town bustling and weekly animal markets when farmers descended to town, busy banks – four of them on the square. Plenty of shops, many butchers and three ironmongers. Thursday afternoons were half days with the town closed and Sundays were dead boring, church and Sunday school after. Even the seasons were defined – with hot summers and cold winters, and they ate seasonally with local meat, limited variety of cheese and there was no wine; she did not see an aubergine till she went to live in France.

She loved her farm life, big house, and gardens, with a large studio for her work as an artist, living next to the village school – which was very nice for Simon who could tumble out of bed and be there in 5 minutes in the mornings, and becoming a focal point for mums with small children going to the same school. She formed deep friendships which have lasted.

Denbigh was looked down upon by folk in Ruthin, and one of her friends had exclaimed: "Council house in Peniel, Helen, what are you doing" when she moved there. However, Helen loves Denbigh, and gets very cross when people put it down and screams at how often Ruthin trumps Denbigh. Moving to Peniel was the best thing she could have done – becoming a part of a very small community, just five adjoining houses with a chapel (since closed) and outlying houses and farms; her dogs with their need for regular walks in the hills have kept her fit. She is very fond of the Denbigh Moors – and held an exhibition to celebrate them, and is very upset with the windfarms which have sprung up all over the hills; she does not mind them and in fact would like to encourage them, but offshore, as they are not just blighting but destroying the nature, not to talk about what happens in a few years when the turbines become obsolete. Progress, eh.

She did not like living in Liverpool and although Marseilles, being different was good, she missed Wales – the greenery and drizzle! Even New Zealand did not appeal, she had decided to go there when she was trying to overcome her loss, to make a

fresh start – “the problems just follow you, I had a better chance of dealing with them in Wales, a place I know and love,” says she.

Although her father, and his side of the family, knew Welsh, her mother did not speak it and Helen was brought up in an English-speaking household and has very basic understanding of Welsh language. “There was no regard for Welsh, and in fact it was looked down upon,” she says. She does not want to judge or generalise, but feels that “the English have a sense of superiority and entitlement, and do not value the Welsh people, a hangover from the past with Welsh-Not (with banning of use of Welsh language) and general oppression.”

Like her family she belonged to Church in Wales, was christened and married in church, and practised Quakerism for a while, but does not see herself as religious – does not believe in God. However, living next door to the chapel in Peniel, she could see, and feel, the buzz on Sundays as the congregation came together. She does not think much of Welsh food – “mother was an awful cook” though Nain made broad beans and bacon with white sauce, lobsouse and barabrith, which was the extent of Welsh cooking. She likes vegetarian food, but I know that this is a concession to me, since I am mainly a vegetarian, and being beef farmers, she was a regular meat eater!

There was no ambition in the family, and may be widely in the area, and people who had become successful were treated disdainfully; could also be the small-town mentality, she says. She certainly was not encouraged and remembers how her mother made fun of her poetry writing which was very hurtful for her. Years later her father valued her efforts when he discovered what she had been paid for her exhibition (not too much as I see it, but she says it was good money), though he never went to see any of her exhibitions!

She is very well read and travelled a lot in Europe in younger days especially, and is cosmopolitan in her outlook now even though she says the first black person she saw was when she was nineteen; a friend of hers came back with a black boyfriend after spending some time in London.

She knows (of) almost everyone in the area - I have a running bet as to how soon will she make a connection when I introduce her to someone, took me on drives in Denbighshire during the pandemic, when we could travel to see all the named villages, and loves old Welsh houses and architecture. She is a great guide for my visitors, with her impressive knowledge and passion for the area and things Welsh.

She is glad that Welsh language is being supported, and impressed that I am learning it – except I only started as she was learning Hindi during pandemic on Duolingo but then stopped, supports Welsh teams especially Rugby. She was surprised when Ruthin got voted the best town in Wales in the Sunday Times in 2023, as the current one is not a patch on what used to be. She is sad that the communities – which are the backbone of Welsh society - are disappearing, and whilst seeing one side of the problem with lack of affordable homes for younger people and influx of second homers, she cannot see how charging up to 300% council tax is going to solve it; it is not as if locals can afford the usual second homes

and chasing them out will only shut down the service industry which at least provides some income. Overall, she says Wales today is not as good as she remembers it from her earlier days.

She says she is Welsh because that is where she was born and brought up and describes herself as British – she is very upset with Brexit, and does not think much of Welsh independence and feels that “we are stronger if we are together.” Being Welsh means living in green, mountainous, wet, beautiful Wales with its changing scenery and fresh air, and local, strong communities. How does she see the future of Wales: “I think Wales will be more attractive in the future, because of what it is, with plentiful nature, and I think we make too much of a fuss about immigrants- ultimately, we are all immigrants since man came out of Africa. To deny it just shows own insecurities. And I would not have met you.” Amen

Cefyn (Ruthin)

I met Cefyn as I used to go down to Ruthin Craft Centre for a coffee in the mornings after I moved to the area, and had dropped into his studio there. Knowing nothing about art, Cefyn is a famous artist and textile designer, we did not have much in common professionally, and I was not buying anything! But something triggered and we bonded, maybe it was his interest in India which he used to visit regularly or maybe he recognised a lost soul. And our get togethers became a regular feature and between him and Mair – the famous harpist who passed away two years ago – we used to sit there and shoot the breeze. These conversations prompted me to further develop Ruthin India Cultural Exchange (RICE) – a programme to celebrate and promote cultural exchanges between India and Wales building on the long-standing connections that started with the first missionaries going to North East India in 1840s. As we were sitting there one day, a ‘young’ woman (Helen) came by and whilst talking to Cefyn caught sight of the poster announcing the forthcoming RICE event, and following her life principle of opening herself to experiences decided to attend; she denies that it had anything to do with my looks as she did not see me ‘like that’ at the time!

I suspect that a part of the reason why Cefyn and I have become good friends is that I am an Indian- he says that the biggest difference is that Welsh were not colonialists, like the English, and worked hard to support and develop the communities they lived in, citing the latest example of his work in North-East India. I joke that we have a common ‘(English) adversary/oppressor’!. Of course, he can speak with some evidence and authority about Wales, as he has also studied the Welsh influence overseas, especially the three main ones in Philadelphia, Patagonia and India. Cefyn is the closest to being a proper Welsh person that I know well, in my circle of friends here, and very proud of being a Cymro; his barabrith is to die for.

Cefyn was born in Bethesda, 9th of ten children and grew up there in 1960s/70s. “Mum’s family had moved to Bethesda from Anglesey in 1820s to work in quarries and dad’s family had a small holding (one acre house) across in Tregarth, and that side of the family included Hywel Hughes of Bogota, who had left Wales to find his fortune elsewhere, and which he did as he became very rich and contributed a lot to Wales by supporting Plaid Cymru, Urdd and Eisteddfod festivals” says he. Sadly (*sic*) the connection dropped once Cefyn’s grandmother passed away.

Mum and dad were poor, not much welfare support – mum was originally going out with Dad’s older brother who got killed in the war; dad was also injured and became a prisoner of war in Java. On return dad was very ill, weighed 5 stones, and had Beri-beri, and stayed in the Liverpool hospital for some time. As happened to many couples those days, mum conceived first and then they were married three months later. Originally a baker’s apprentice, mum stopped working with the growing brood of children, and dad had a job with the council as a school caretaker and then as a road sweeper- “I remember seeing him on his way to and from my school with the wheelie bin and broom.” Originally from quarry houses, they got a home on the council estate. The whole community was like an extended family – different generations, lots of children, second marriages and all poor. “I remember having to

run to grandma every Thursday to borrow a pound as money would run out, and then run back to return it next day as dad got his wage. You did not realise you were poor. Bethesda was a mixed community with some better off people, and so some of the kids had bikes who would then ride off to places. But I had to run there to meet them. But it was how it was- I never thought about it.” Funny enough, despite the poverty, he remembers the community organising events in the estate to raise money especially for Dr Bernardos. “Mum was conscious of the class difference and became very fastidious – the kids had to be clean and well turned out!” The women in the community supported each other- many of them widows – and Cefyn remembers all the aunties. Happy times, he reminisces. (Note: subsequently I read the famous book: ‘One moonlit night’ by Caradog Pritchard, in English, Cefyn says spot on, that was Bethesda).

He went to the local schools and was educated in Welsh, and did not speak English till secondary school, and did not know any English people. He remembers an English family who used to rent a cottage locally for holidays though. He had school trips to Bangor with the highlight being a trip to Paris when he was 15- after working at the Co-op and summer holidays to save money. It was standard practice in industrial estates, you looked after each other, worked hard - a work ethic he still has.

The eight children before him in the family after schooling went into trades. Cefyn continued but was put on six monthly renewable probation in the A Stream - which was for high graders and mostly for students from middle classes - because he was not the ‘usual’ student given his background! He then got an educational grant (those were the days) and went to Birmingham University to study arts – something he had become interested in after a teacher encouraged him to go on the Paris school trip. “Birmingham was not a good experience, my world was very different to the world there, too alien, they also mocked my accent” and so he applied to and got into Manchester after the first year, believing that he would start again, having “learnt the ropes” in Birmingham, and then went on to do his Masters at the RCA in London. After working there, for some famous people like Paul Smith and companies like Liberty and Harvey Nichols he started on his way back via Macclesfield where he worked on his weaving which then brought him to work in Trefriw, and bought a home in Penmaenmawr (since then he has moved to Deganwy). Full circle- back to Wales which he had missed tremendously over the last few years.

Coming back after being away for a few years, he says “I saw Wales afresh, and was struck by the changes happening in Wales, and in particular what was happening to the chapels- the focal points of the Welsh communities. Bethesda when I was growing up had four chapels, with the largest, Jerusalem seating up to 1000 people. There used to be *Gymanfau* (assemblies) when people got together, and overall, I felt that the colour was going out of society.” By that time he had met Martin, who lived in Penarth and during his weekly drives – on A470 - from Penmaenmawr to Penarth to see Martin, he would notice chapels. To him the chapels told interesting stories- the colour represented the stone in the area, the size/features the population and affluence, and the ones nearer seaports having ‘foreign’ material- seemingly the overseas ships would be carrying ballast which was

off loaded as they filled up with Welsh materials and the left overs were used locally for construction and decorations. So, chapels are a study in Geology, Sociology and Business, and he made them the focus of his art; he started drawing them – and that is what he is famous for: Cefyn is chapels! (Note to self: plan a road trip with Cefyn to see the chapels, a bit like the book: A470 poems for the road!)

He then pursued this interest internationally, starting in Pennsylvania, USA, where he went after getting a grant from Wales Art Council. He was used to Welsh chapels and it took him time to get his head around the buildings there: "Chapels in Wales were two dimensional, originally with side entrances and later at the gable ends, and he knew how to draw them, but in USA, they were more spread out in three dimensional shapes – utility look of white boxes in industrial areas, and it took some figuring out. I guess this was because there was more land whereas in Wales the chapels were squeezed in tight spaces. However, it may also be because the Welsh in USA did not want to stand out, instead wanting to integrate", he observed. This latter point struck him as he observed that one side of the road had the Welsh Baptist and on the other side was the English Baptist chapel, because as the next generation did not learn Welsh they drifted to the English one - "the language was dying and disappearing within two generations." He went further afield on to the East Coast, and saw a different model in Vermont, which was more like the Welsh at home - because of slate quarries there – the irony is that Welsh went there, worked in quarries and started exporting tiles to UK. He became rather fond of Vermont and bought a house and set up a store there with his partner, Martin- and indeed they solemnised their civil partnership in Vermont. They ran the shop for many years.

His reputation spread and he was asked to go and study the Welsh colony in Argentina; Michael D Jones, a Welsh nationalist, non-conformist preacher was concerned that the Welsh were losing their identity too quickly in USA, and explored other places to migrate to, to preserve Welsh culture. Palestine and Uganda were ruled out but the Argentinian government welcomed them, mainly to inhabit the desert area in Chubut province initially, in Patagonia, and then spread further across the Andes. Whilst out there, he was more interested in exploring the relationships between the three people: the Indigenous - like the Tehuelche people, the Welsh, and Spanish, with three religions and three languages; the Welsh colony, despite being surrounded by shanty towns all round, was able to continue with their traditions – the Eisteddfods and Gymanfas and Welsh schools. He says: "there was no point in going across the planet, to see the same folk, the Welsh, I had to understand their interactions."

Whilst the USA and Argentinian migrations were for economic reasons and the English oppression experienced by the Welsh, the migration to India was due to religious reasons. Rev Thomas Jones refused to go to Africa as was the practice in the missions, and instead suggested North East of India in 1840s and which led to the strong links between the two countries, which persist to this day, and which is the focus of his work now days as he is fulfilling his (and mine) friend Mair Jones' wish to promote musical exchanges between the two countries.

So, what is Welshness for him? Is it defined in the negative- that is Not English or something more? We both puzzle over this, and he counters by asking me what is Indian as opposed to Pakistani- knowing that my parents came from what became Pakistan during the partition and culturally we are same folk on either side of the border, with similar languages and cuisine; the political border and now religion is increasingly dividing us. Maybe it was religion- he is very staunchly Methodist Calvinist – but he says it was not just the religion, which by itself does not constitute Welshness, since it was a package with the Chapels, which held the communities together, with their Eisteddfods, Gymanfas, Sunday Schools and acting as the safety net and providing welfare. The Churches were for the landed folk- the ruling classes, whilst the Chapels were for the workers, who became non-conformists. All this is disappearing with loss of chapels, and changing society, and he notices the last-ditch attempts in some areas where chapels are being bought by locals and run as community pubs/shops to provide a focal point. Of course, the language played a strong part in promoting the identity and cohesion, but it should not be restricted to the ‘Welsh (White)’ as he fondly points out the ‘Asian and African Welsh’ spoken by those communities in Cardiff; he worries about the polarisation between promoters of the language and resisters.

In essence, Welshness to him is a way of life, that he was brought up with, which means the best of human values – compassion, empathy, hard work; the scenery helps but people trump the place. And that is what the struggle is about: to maintain this essence, the true Welsh identity. He would like to see more use of Welsh language, but not at the cost of a split over it – since there are already two Wales: South is very different to the North, and just more Welsh language especially schools will not make it so, there is something deeper, which is being lost with loss of chapels and communities.

In a final attempt to define Welshness, he talks about Martin, his long-term partner: “he is English, and secular, but has become Welsh! His thought processes are like mine and on her visits Martin’s mother used to chide him that Cefyn had changed him and made him Welsh.”

As far as I am concerned if more association with Cefyn will make me more Welsh, then bring it on.

Ceinwen (Llanbedr)

I met Ceinwen through our poetry group, I knew her husband, Robert, already through NantClwyd y Dre (the oldest timber framed house), and over the years they have become good friends – and being very generous hosts, they are always feeding us; both physically and intellectually.

Ceinwen was born in Rhosllanerchrugog in a Welsh family, with generations living in the same area – just inside the Welsh border, a real Welsh community surrounded by a sea of English. Her father was an electrician and mother a secretary, and Ceinwen went to a Welsh Primary School – taught in Welsh, going home to Welsh speaking family and attending the chapel made her who she is, says she. She then went to a Grammar school, which like her primary school was single sex; the boys and girls even had their own buses and separate bus-stands. The only Welsh thing at the Grammar school was the yearly Eisteddfod, and thus began the process of Anglicisation. The current focus on Welsh being taught all across nowadays misses the point, as English-speaking parents send children there but they then come home to English speakers and tradition: “it dilutes the Welshness, whilst ticking boxes.”

She is a non-conformist Baptist and enjoyed the Sunday schools and the chapel activities, and especially the singing; she remembers the hymns having the words and tunes written in both Staff and ‘Sol-fa’ (aka Tonic sol-fa) notations, with the native Welsh speakers using the latter which was easier. People with limited literacy could easily follow the music and became natural singers- the Welsh love singing.

She particularly remembers one of the ministers, Lewis Valentine, who along with two others was jailed for bombing the planned Bombing school (being set up in anticipation of the second World War) in 1936; Lewis had served in the first war and had become a pacifist and he was also a nationalist. The trial originally scheduled to be held in Caernarfon had to be moved to Old Bailey’s London since there was no jury who would have sentenced Lewis; he served the nine months sentence in Wormwood Scrubs and became a minister. The more recent bombings of second homes in Wales has a precedence, she observes.

Her mum died when Ceinwen was 14 and then dad had a heart attack, she sat her O-levels when her dad was in a convalescent home and then she did not continue her studies and became a carer; she thanks her dad’s union for their help with his convalescence. Post the War, there was a big drive to increase teacher numbers and with help of Lewis she went to teacher training – without the A levels, and which meant she started with a disadvantage, because of missing that vital period when students are taught to think for themselves. After the first year of training in Wales she went to London where she then also worked for 8 years- lot of the teachers from Wales went to the big cities in England since there were not enough jobs; so Wales was a production factory for the English needs!

There was a Welsh Society in London, but due to the logistics of travelling to central London, when she was in South London, she did not attend it; in any case she was with six other Welsh speaking teachers in her school so did not miss home. This is also because being interested in theatre, she enjoyed being there and remembers

the Little Vic fondly. She also acknowledges the Inner London Education Department, part of the Greater London Council, much hated by the Tories and which was very generous, and also encouraged her to start Adult Welsh teaching classes in the evening- she got paid for these.

She met Robert in London, and they moved to Liverpool with his work, and she worked there for two years, before another move of Robert's job to St Asaph brought them to Wales; initially living in Glan Conwy, they moved to just outside Ruthin and have been here for last 40 years, and she taught Welsh at the local Welsh schools.

She sees the influx of outsiders, largely the English from Lancashire and Cheshire, slowly eroding the Welsh communities with parts of the Llyn Peninsula devoid of native Welsh. She laments that the outsiders take no interest in the language or community; they have been patronising and see Welsh as beneath them. The area is "seen as a dormitory- they go back to England for work, and come and sleep here"; the common image of Wales being of coalmines and daffodils.

"We are pedalling hard to stand still" – and "my fellow Welsh people are not being helpful"; she highlights the South: North divide, with Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan having little Welsh language; to her the reason for 'fighting' for the language is because it is the last bastion – the traditions and chapels are already largely gone and even the Eisteddfod is coming under pressure for its insistence on Welsh language, and this is worrying to her. She wants South to do more, as the main keepers of Welsh identity from North Wales started shifting to South with the demise of slate industry to work in coal mines decades ago and then lost their 'identity', the overall pool is small. The remaining farmers are not enough to sustain Welshness, and because of economic pressures with farming not paying enough, even this is slowly going, and anyway there are no supporting communities. She is well travelled internationally, and says she expects the capital of the country to reflect the national identity, which she found missing in Cardiff, though some things are slowly happening like the Senedd. "I am pessimistic about the future of Wales – Welshness is a combination of language, traditions and religion, and all these were kept together through the chapels, which are largely gone." Home to her is "a feeling of belonging' and "I do not feel that I belong in Cardiff."

Robert is from Cumbria and belongs to Church of England and though they have been together a long time, she does not feel that he is integrated into Wales. How can proper integration happen reminds her of the joke about the Welsh person who was introduced to the God in heaven, and was asked where he had come from and when he said Wales, God reminisced that he had given Wales the most beautiful hills, valleys, rivers and people, and wondered why they forgot who their neighbour was! There is definitely an element of 'Anti-English' as part of Welshness, being reinforced by Lewis Valentine case and Lynn Celyn reservoir, it seems.

Emyr (Peniel)

From the day I started visiting Peniel, I used to see Emyr (as I got to know later) either doing the school runs or on his quad bike looking after the sheep; he would always wave and say hello, and since I started learning Welsh he would stop for a brief chat for me to 'ymarfer fy Nghymraeg'.

Emyr was born not far from where he lives under Moel Gasyth in Peniel- his father had the farm down the road and Emyr remembers him as the shepherd, his mother was also local. One of three children, Emyr went to the Church School in Pant Pastynog and later to the high school in Denbigh; the school bus used to pick the children up then, and his education was bilingual. There used to be two streams in high school: Welsh and English, and he was in the Welsh stream. His childhood was very Welsh, with first language and very tight close-knit community. At age 15, as soon as he could 'escape' he left school and went to work on a farm and then joined Welsh Water where he worked for all his adult life; although farming was in the family he says "it did not pay enough" and he had to take up the job. He met Llinos at a meeting in Pwllglas and they got married; Llinos is also local though from the other side of the valley in Clawddnewydd and worked as a nurse in Abergele Hospital till her retirement some years ago. They brought up their two children here and both live locally, in Denbigh town.

Emyr is now long retired from his 'proper job' but as Llinos says he will never retire and keeps himself busy with various activities; they have about 120 sheep and which gives him little extra income – the amount of work that goes into looking after the sheep and the return is not untypical and is the reason why young folk do not want to take it up. He is now 'a jack of all trades' doing various small jobs, given that he is very handy I suggest that he is clearly a 'master' of some.

He remembers all the local farms and families – he has an encyclopaedic memory, and remembers who had how many cows, hens, sheep etc. All families did their own milking with the rest of the milk being put in churns and left by the gate for the Milk Board to come and collect it; similarly with the eggs- "none of that selecting of sizes, all the eggs went together." There was a local shop in Nantglyn, which also had a school, with three chapels in the area; Peniel, Saron and Nantglyn, and overall, the communities were self-sufficient – it was all local produce, and few needs. The chapel kept the community together in Peniel, with about 50 members from the surrounding houses and farms, with a Thursday evening meeting with activities for the children, and three services on Sundays. It was all done in Welsh and there were very few English speakers. Not until 1980s did he start noticing people from outside the area, with Jim down the road being one of the earliest outsiders – from the Wirral - moving here. It was a Welsh way of life: "we all knew and helped each other with close family ties," with common language, traditions with eisteddfods including a local one and Thanksgiving.

Life has changed a lot since their early days, the main changes started when the youngsters stopped going to the chapel – the previously 'sacred' Sunday when everyone stopped work and focussed on family and chapel was now taken up with

rugby and football and going to Denbigh town. Once they had tasted the bigger outside world their local ties became loose, and the drift out of Peniel started. They both credit the few outsiders who have moved here for their attempts to integrate. But the area once characterised by generations of 'Welsh' families is now becoming mixed and once their generation passes on, the old Wales they remember will be gone. Denbigh to them is not the same; "people hardly know each other, unlike here where if you need anything someone will come along to help."

They are trying to keep the community together as much as they can, the loss of their focal point with the closure of the chapel in Peniel has been a blow, and the main connector is the monthly printed newsletter- Y Gadlas - with news from all the neighbouring communities.

Their world is very defined and restricted to the area- Emyr has lived all his life within about a mile of where he was born, and although aware of the issues within Wales- the South dominating over the North and the 'anti-English' feeling they do not pay much attention to these and instead focus on what can be done. What will it be like in ten years' time, they wonder, but for now they love living here – "I will never move" says Emyr. "I wake up in the morning and the birds flock around, waiting for their feed, the dogs bark in the evening to be allowed in" – they usually run around in the front, the views of the Clwydian range from their elevated house cannot be bettered, nor easily bought these days. They recount the story of a friend who gave in and moved into town recently, and is rather miserable.

"The library bus that used to pull up outside, and the school bus to take children and who were always running around in the area within a thriving community around the chapel" was the essence of the Welshness to them, and the only thing that is holding the culture together is the language and even that is facing attacks from non-Welsh speakers, with the already existing differences between various forms of the language with North, South, Mid and West versions getting exaggerated.

Lot of the changes they have seen were inevitable and there is no going back. What was their advice to someone coming from outside, and their answer was what should happen anywhere: "show respect, learn about the other and integrate – not in terms of submerging your culture/identity but recognising and celebrating the differences." They certainly embody this advice.

Julie (Ruthin)

Julie is Helen's childhood friend and like many of her generation was born at the H M Stanley Hospital in St Asaph to parents, both of whom came from Bala area. Mum's family were one of the early migrants to Pennsylvania in the 19th century. Julie's grandmother had fallen ill with rheumatic fever whilst in USA and had to come back to Wales! Mum was a home maker with some odd jobs like cleaning whilst dad worked as a poorly paid farm worker, as a tractor driver at Llysfasi College when Julie was born and the family lived in a tied house next to the College. Her sibling, Gareth, was born three years there later, a home birth: "His arrival is one of my earliest memories, I was wearing a red dressing gown, standing on top of the stairs, whilst mum was delivering with help from her sister and grandma, both of whom had come to look after me." She started school in Pentrecelyn and continued her primary schooling in Llandyrnog, where she was one of eight students, out of a hundred, who was a Welsh speaker; Llandyrnog was a largely English place, and then in Bothryn where she met Helen and both of them went to Brynhyfryd school for their secondary education in Ruthin, as the family had moved to Ruthin then. With ten O levels, but no idea what to do next, since she had failed her A levels and could not go to the University, she took on some odd jobs and then "mum and dad took me to Naylor Leyland Careers Office and the lady there suggested a number of options and I chose to go and become an Occupational Therapist". Although this was available in a privately run college in Liverpool (since then absorbed into the university), she got a full grant – over and above the usual college grants since her academic years were longer. A successful career in the NHS then saw her rise through the ranks, gaining further professional and managerial qualifications, and although largely based in Shrewsbury she worked for some time back in Wales in Llandudno and in Manchester, and ultimately retired as the service manager of mental health services in Shrewsbury, in 2012.

"I came from a Welsh speaking family, I did not learn Welsh formally, either in primary or secondary, and it just came to me" says she, "and this meant that although I was good at speaking in Welsh, my reading and writing skills were not as well developed". She had very little exposure to Welsh culture: "although I attended the Sunday School at the chapel- mum was chapel but dad was church, mum used to take me to chapel while dad took Gareth to the church", and she later on got confirmed at the church, aged 13, as it happens at the same time as her mother who a non-conformist had to join the Anglican Church. Julie gives her credit to her parents who both had an equal role, she says that people do not always appreciate the strong roles of women – "Wales was almost a matriarchal society (at home, mums ruled though dads had the authority outside!)" "It was only much later that I learnt Welsh songs when I started singing in the Llandudno Choir." The family did not go to Eisteddfodau and the school did not encourage it. "We did not know much Welsh history, it was the era of 'anglicising the Welsh' and anyway our parents discouraged us from getting involved with Welsh activities". There was a lot of Welsh nationalistic activity in the 1960s-1970s with house burnings for example, and of course Tryweryn became the focal point of the movement, and even though the

Welsh Language Act had been passed in 1967, its use was not promoted outside of family with the emphasis being on English.

“I am Welsh” says she, “and sometimes described myself as British to avoid being sidelined or ridiculed, but never English in the past, and have become more Welsh over the last 20 years”. She was married in 1997 and the couple lived in Shrewsbury, but the marriage broke down in 2017 and she moved back to the family home in Ruthin.

“We could have gone down the way of Northern Ireland” she says, “the nationalist movement followed a similar pattern there, with home burnings and blowing up water pipelines by Free Wells Army (FWA) but the big difference was that we had our unique language and culture and that made our identity more secure.” The Language Act, with for example use of dual signage, probably helped avoid the problems of N Ireland and the 1979 Welsh referendum for more autonomy was defeated. “Although the sense of place, having spent childhood in Vale of Clwyd, is a factor, it is really the language that makes me Welsh”

“We are in a good place” and she is for Welsh independence, and believes that Wales is viable on its own- “not very different to many small European countries.” “We have been the first English colony for too long and need to overthrow the shackles.” A good start would be the abolition of Prince of Wales title and hopes that Prince William will not appoint his son as such, and break this centuries old colonisation tradition, which just reinforces the anti-English feeling. “Why do we always say England and Wales, why lump us together, when Scotland and Ireland are seen as separate in their own rights”, she complains, and want to see the devolution strengthened. England does not understand Wales, “We are different, we think and live differently” and this comes from the Welsh non-conformist tradition, which she does not see as being rebellion, but more a healthy and open questioning of dogma and a more socialist approach, and this to her is the Welsh culture.

She is not happy about Wales being seen as “England by the sea’ with further influx of English especially following the Covid pandemic, with places like Abersoch, and others, becoming ghost towns out of season and even the local primary school closing there. “I do not mind immigration, and welcome it, but not colonisation – the English superiority and looking down on the Welsh, is unhealthy, unhelpful and persistent”; she emphasises the last point since she has not seen much change in English attitudes towards the Welsh during her life time and says “whilst it is illegal to discriminate against me (that is, Rajan) on grounds of race, the discrimination against the Welsh goes on subtly and without challenge.” “I am not saying do not come to Wales, only that show some sensitivity and be respectful of local culture,” she is all for a multicultural Wales. She is also clear that the north: south divide in Wales has not helped by not having better roadways from top to bottom, with even the rail journeys require one to go via England. “We have a very Cardiff centered way of governing”, and “they do make some daft decisions when it comes to North Wales.”

The Immigrants: those who have made it home now

Paul (Peniel)

Living on the highest spot in Peniel, just under Moel Gasyth, Paul, a keen cyclist, holds the record for the maximum number of rides up the steep bend on B 5401– a popular challenge for cyclists in North Wales who come from far and wide on this popular route. He is a regular walking companion for Helen, both of whom can be seen wandering around there with various dogs in tow. How he got here, and what he makes of Wales, is the story I wanted to find out.

Born in Chester, so officially an English man, to mum from Wallasey, Merseyside and dad from Wrexham, the family moved out to Bermuda soon after his birth as they got jobs there as nurses- they had met whilst training as nurses and got married; interesting given the current discussion about Windrush and people especially nurses coming from the Caribbean to the UK to see someone going in the other direction in 1972. Whilst there the parents split up and mum and Paul and his older sister (by three years) moved back to Merseyside and at age 5 he contracted whooping cough and was nursed by mum's colleague, another nurse, and went to stay with her in Denbigh for a month to recover- his first visit to North Wales. Although mum had a boyfriend in Merseyside, this one did not work out either and she moved to Denbigh to be near her friend – Auntie Joyce as she became known - and worked at the Denbigh Mental Hospital as a mental health nurse. After living in a flat for 18 months they got a new Council house, overlooking fields and countryside, with space to play outside, and on top of the town; he really liked the house. He started at the local primary school, which he walked to, and then moved to the high school in town and studied Welsh, which was compulsory till age 13, but did not use it as there was no need.

His mum gave up nursing and took over as a pub landlady and then met another man and together they managed one of the busiest pubs in town – for Paul it was a very cool arrangement; and he would bring his friends back after a night out in town for some afterhours drinking as teenagers. Mum was very moody and a difficult person and he remembers coming home one evening to see her latest boyfriend chucking her stuff out of the upstairs window on the street below. Another move followed, with mum moving back to the Council House, which she had bought when these were sold off during Thatcher's time, but by now he was almost ready for university, and had already started working various odd jobs and especially at the Sportsman Arms, a famous landmark pub on the Denbigh Moors, and used to ride his bike to work there.

By now he wanted big lights and was done with small town North Wales and went to Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University) for four years; "I had no intention of ever coming back to Wales" and loved his time in Manchester which had so much to offer with its music scene. "I wanted the hustle and bustle and chaos of city". He did come back after studying textiles, not knowing what to do with life, and after sometime at home went away to Alps and worked as a 'Ski-bum' for a year, and then another stint at home followed. Denbigh was the base, he had

enough of Manchester by then and did not want to go to London, and managed with various jobs till he joined a local electronics outfit and has been working in IT since 1998. He then lived in Belgium and Barcelona and travelled extensively in Europe: "I used to fly almost 40 weeks a year between different cities as part of the work". "I arrived in Barcelona in 2005 and within two days knew I would not settle there" though he ended up living there for four years, and that is where he realised that he was going to move back to Wales. "I do not know why, it is something intangible, and as exciting as Barcelona was, I knew I had to be in Wales" and says one of the factors was the peace and quiet of small town and countryside in North Wales, and of course his sister and family lived locally.

Being English in Wales has never been an issue for him and he feels very comfortable in Wales. He was exposed to Welsh culture in school and participated very actively in the eisteddfods and Urdd with singing, poetry recitation, playing the recorder and dancing; "I was immersed in the Welsh culture" says he of his childhood. Although the very large mental hospital has closed with its implications for jobs, and dispersal of long-term residents into the town, and the general economic decline, Denbigh has not changed much in the last 50 years. There is a familiarity about it – it is as if time has stood still here, the pace of life is slower. "I am a strong advocate for Wales and was like an ambassador promoting it when I was working overseas", Wales as opposed to UK was seen as distinct and especially given its long history which used to impress his American colleagues especially. Of course everyone asked him about the town with the longest name and he was able to impress them by not just being able to pronounce it but also write it. He loves to take his visitors around especially to Snowdonia and Llandudno; "I belong to Wales" – despite being born in England and it is the culture and natural beauty that does it for him: "the alps may be dramatic but Welsh mountains and hills are beautiful" and "I do not want to live anywhere else". Of course there is a practical reason also as he could not have afforded the type of house with land that he has anywhere else.

"I regret not keeping up with my Welsh language and would like to learn it before I die" remarks he, emphasising the importance of language for culture; there is no economic reason for him to learn it otherwise. There is another reason as his brother in law is a first language speaker and his young niece is more comfortable in Welsh than English- and family is very important to him.

He has not spent much time outside of North Wales, though has visited South for short periods, and he sees the future in terms of the natural beauty; there is no major service or manufacturing industry here and "we need to make most of our main asset and develop tourism and leisure" (Do you have any views on the second homers?).

Gordon (Llanbedr)

“I wish I had known I was Welsh” starts Gordon, in early 90s and my neighbour, and “I regret not knowing the language”. Born in a caravan in Rosyth, Flintshire, son of a farm worker father and stay at home mum, the family started moving around as dad had to go looking around for work, on the Wirral. He would move the meagre family belongings on a pony and trap each time, and Gordon started his schooling in local schools- 8 schools in 9 years, being looked after mainly by grandmother and staying with parents whenever they could have him. As soon as he was 14 he started working – “I finished school on Friday and was working as an office boy on Monday in the Shell works in Ellesmere Port”. “I had no idea what to do, and had to do what the dad said”– and the parents did not know about education and were concerned to make a living. Gordon used to bike to work and worked for the doctors at the Thornton Research Centre, and on his own accord started night school. Gaining firsts and distinctions in Maths/technical drawing/science and English he progressed to assistant draughtsmen jobs and then went to work for the RAF as did his three brothers. He was very good in sports and competed successfully in various track events and games – “I wish I had stayed on in the forces, my life would have been different” but once the two years were over, dad called him back home, and fortunately his old job was still open. He left it after 8 years – and still has the Swan Parker Pen, 14 carat gold from Shell – as “I did not want an office job, I wanted to be outside.” A Credit Union job then took him on the road and later got him sent to Kings Lynn to run the business there, and which he left after 3 years when his father-in-law died and Gordon’s mum wanted to get back home to Merseyside, and he went back to Shell.

His Welsh journey did not start until much later in his life: “I was on way to Aberdyfi on some Shell work and whilst changing trains at Barmouth I went to the café to get a cuppa, and the girls there tried to have a laugh with me and replied to me in Welsh. I thought I was in a foreign country, as I did not know that there was a separate Welsh language.” “When I was young and mainly with grandma, I thought the world was between Oswestry and Shrewsbury; Geography though a school subject was not important.”

Another stint with the Credit Union then started bringing him into Wales and meeting the farmers- “I struggled with the impact on borrowers, and when one of them broke down unable to pay loans, I decided I need to do something else” and which brought him to NFU as a salesman- supplying both, arable and feed stuff to farmers all over north-east Wales.

The family, and by then he had two children, moved to Mold, and he finally came home to Wales where he was born and has been since, and for last 40 years in Llanbedr. “It was a completely different world; I was the only non-Welsh speaker amongst mainly Welsh speaking farmers.” He says he was nervous at the interview for the job as the other candidates were Welsh speakers and was surprised when he did get it. His job meant liaising with farmers including attending any local meetings which would be held in Welsh, and “we would get through with pidgin -English and often I would ring the chairman next morning to make sure I got it right.” The farmers

were very helpful, not just inviting him to partake the egg and bacon butties when he would arrive in the mornings on his visits but the chairmen would often ask him to supper after the meetings which would finish around 9. "Overall, it was a wonderful life."

His interest in sports and games led him to walking, and with his son he did all the mountains in North Wales, and until the age of 80 used to go up Moel Fenlli (second highest in the Clwydian Range) for his early morning 'walk' with his dog everyday! When I met him to learn about his life, he was reading the diary his friend had kept of all the walks he had done with his wife over his life time- Gordon was reading one of the nine journals, and reminiscing about his own experiences. Nature clearly played an important role in his life and he is happy to be in North Wales.

"If I had known I was Welsh, I would have competed as a Welshman in the Forces game" where he was very successful, "I saw myself as British then" he says.

I am a bit partial since Gordon is a role model for me, and this has nothing to do with the fact that he says it is nice to have immigrants – "I learnt about India from you" especially when we have the Diwali functions.

Tony (Minera)

A retired airlines pilot who has become a regular companion as we both indulge in our passion for walking in the Welsh (mainly North) hills, I call these walks my therapy sessions as Tony is a great listener and very helpful for when I need to 'workout'; the weight of the black dog starts lifting when I am on the hills with Tony.

Son of a South Walian father and Scottish mother, both of whom met whilst working with the Air Force in Egypt, Tony was born in Cranfield and spent his childhood in various places in the UK as the family moved around with work, and his parents eventually settled in Farnham in Surrey. His first introduction to Wales was when he went to Bangor University to do Marine Biology in 1972, but was enchanted by the airplanes from RAF Valley nearby and after university joined the RAF, which took him to different places especially Scotland – and we share a common interest in the Shetlands where he used to fly -with a shorter stint in Rhosneigr on Anglesey. He then left the RAF to go commercial flying with Britannia Airlines, and that brought him back to Wales in 1989 after over a decade away; "I had to live within 50 miles of Manchester Airport and we wanted a small holding for the ponies for our two daughters, and were looking around Wrexham area. We were scouting and across the valley I saw a road up the hill and thought it would be great place to live, so we drove up Minera Mountain, and there was a house for sale- one of two places there". "I thought we would stay for a few years, as the longest I had ever lived in one place was four years in Scotland, but nearly 35 years later I am still here".

When he first came to Bangor in 1972, Wales was a backwater, a country in decline with collapse of heavy industry and left over attitudes of post-industrial places. "Compared to other places where I had lived, there was no care for the environment also" says he.

Things have changed a lot, and for the better, he says with more employment and especially more interest in and support for environment. Wrexham area has benefitted from new industries with lot of people moving there, many immigrants from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Wrexham is a multi-cultural city, and of course with the Hollywood actors owning Wrexham Football Club the city is on the map now. The surrounding areas are however still predominantly White.

When he was studying at Bangor University, he lived in Bethesda, a proper Welsh area with first language speakers, but Tony did not learn it – "there was no need since English was widely spoken, and the University itself, unlike larger universities in Wales, had a majority of non-Welsh speaking students". He had no 'Welsh' friends and says although familiar with cultural traditions of Wales such as the Eisteddfod, poetry and singing, he is not knowledgeable about it. The Barabryth and Welsh cakes he loves are the extent of his experience of Welsh cuisine. It is really the nature – hills, coastline, greenery, sheep that define Wales for him.

From his upbringing and job which has taken him all over the globe, many times over, he has a very liberal and cosmopolitan outlook, and takes people as individuals and does not see the need for categorisation. He sees himself as British, never English though sometimes maybe Celtic; although his young son with his Indonesian

wife is going to the local school and learning Welsh. What Alfie will say, in time, given his background will be interesting, Tony does not emphasise the Welshness since he does not think of himself in Welsh terms. Beyond nature he has no Welsh connection; he sometimes wonders about living in Scotland which he loves; but he says he is over it though it took him quite some time to accept Wales as home, now he is happy here.

Pamela (Peniel)

I met Pam when I was looking for a Yoga instructor to hold an event for the Ruthin India Cultural Exchange the year after I arrived in Ruthin, she also then did sessions on Laughter Yoga - another success.

“English, though do not identify myself as such, but born in England. I am in my early 70s, teacher, businesswoman, mum, wife and lover”, she starts as we begin our conversation about her story. Born in Rugby to dad who created successful business from his beginning as a bricklayer and stay at home mum, she has two brothers and grew up with all the relatives living close by, and grandparents next door. Her childhood was marked by a sense of loss, as the friends she would make in the neighbourhoods kept moving away with their parents’ job changes, so she became quite close to her brother (the younger one was ten years later), and a tomboy – walking to school and learned to swim in the canal. Though a lovely childhood, her father was an absentee and volatile dad – he expected the children to be in bed by the time he would come back from work at 7pm, and mum taught her to keep peace with him. She was not particularly close to mum – a mark (she says) of that age-group who did not share their thoughts and feelings. She went to the local Church primary school and was good in studies and got into the Grammar school and then got the educational grant to go to Leicester University to study Politics and Sociology. “Like other girls I was not taught to think for myself and found myself arriving in the place- I went to Leicester as my close friend was going there and chose the same subjects as one of the friends”. Due to the strict home environment, she admits she went a bit wild at the University!

Doing her Sociology dissertation about alcoholism brought her into contact with down and out and homeless people which made an impact. Jobs were easy in those days and she did a variety of them after her course; and got married to David whom she had met at the University. After a spell of 5 years working for Marks and Spencer, and then Cadbury Schweppes, she and David decided to set off on their travels, following the ‘Hippy Trail’ on the then renowned ‘Magic Bus’, across Europe, and then on to Afghanistan where the money ran out and Pam got sick enough to know she needed to rest. On being told that there were jobs in Iran they turned back and whilst Pam taught in the American Schools system, David found work on the oil rigs project in Isfahan - the money was good but it was a rigid society, just before the overthrow of Shah and arrival of Khomeini. Being a western woman in that traditional Muslim society was very challenging. Before the days of internet when you would be able to research local mores and traditions, Pam found her naivety about the way she should behave a challenge. For example, going out had to be escorted, or driven by one of the designated company taxi drivers; riding a bicycle was totally ‘no, no’; and wearing a sleeveless t-shirt was ‘asking for trouble’. She and David lived in the ‘ex-pat’ community in a specially built town for the oil-rig and ancillary workers in the desert in Isfahan where they made life-long friends. After a year they came back to stay with mum and dad where they helped Pam’s parents open and run a coffee-shop. The travelling was not, however, over and the itch took them first of all through Europe and then to USA which was where David had the ‘Aha’ moment and decided

that he wanted to become a furniture restorer with help from his uncle who was in that business – a qualified cabinet maker. After a stint in Hemel Hempstead with the uncle where he learnt the trade, David then started his own business. After the birth of their first child, they both realised that David would not see much of family life working a 7-day week. So on a visit to North Wales where Pam's mum and dad had by that stage moved (to Betws y Coed) they began scouting for a place – the main criteria being somewhere with a workshop for David to run his business. Their home, Aberglyniau, in Peniel was ideal and they have been there since 1985.

Pam was very ignorant about Wales until then: “Although the signs were bilingual, she thought they were pointing to two different things !!!(sic)”. Peniel was a small, first language Welsh, hamlet and she was very miserable there for a number of years: “go back to where you came from’ was one taunt to her daughter. (Pam has three children: two boys and a girl). The taunt made her feel very uncomfortable. The situation changed with two things: Pam had ‘inherited’ (at the suggestion of the owners of Aberglyniau) an old lady who lived in the house that Helen has, and started taking her shopping each Friday and to doctor and optician appointments. Mrs Rawson became a good and close friend to Pam, and gave her valuable insights into Wales and the culture. Pam also met with a group of ‘Ex-pats’ who had moved to Nant Glyn down the valley - and theirs is another story of lifelong friendships. The children went to Nant Glyn Primary school where all age groups were in one class together and where they learned Welsh. Sadly, the children numbers dwindled in Nantglyn and the school was closed down, as did many of the businesses - a once thriving village, though idyllic, is now bereft of any local amenities but still manages to be a thriving and close-knit community which has learned to compensate for its lack of shop, pub etc. Pam learnt rudimentary Welsh through the School PTA, and did Adult Welsh classes. All three children are fluent Welsh speakers, and even though only Ben lives locally, he teaches some of his drum students in Welsh; Josh lives in London but has Welsh first-language friends there; and Amber is often called upon for when dealing with Welsh speaking patients in the hospital in Cardiff where she is a children's oncology nurse. Pam says the best thing was the meithrinfas (Welsh nurseries) for the children; and she took them to the Urdd and national Eisteddfodau and celebrated St David's Day.

Being an internationalist, and in her desire to integrate she tried going to the Chapel, (though she is Church of England/Wales). She found the people very kind there, but Pam noticed that her presence was unsettling as the Welsh speakers switched to English in her presence; she says “they were always really welcoming and very good mannered, but I felt I was imposing on them’ and she stopped going to the Chapel.

She has seen Denbigh change since they moved here in 1985 - she remembers Ben, the oldest child staring at a different coloured person in the street as they were such a rare sight! With the arrival of nurses from Philippines – who came to work in the care sector- and some doctors, Denbigh started becoming multicultural.

She does not see Wales as an independent nation: “I don't think it could survive on its own’, and she loves living here, “the children had a great time – free to roam around and you knew that the Aberglyniau children would be looked after by

everyone in the area. A great outdoors upbringing gave the children the best start in life, with a new language and culture, with nature and love of mountains. I do not mind the weather – you learn to adjust your clothing to whatever the weather throws at you! I do wish I had learnt Welsh properly- it's on my To Do List!"

"Wales is my home, though I do not think I am fully accepted here" as she remembers being called "you English" on a recent meeting with some neighbours at the Eisteddfod. There is a price, she says of choosing Wales and wanting to make it home, without understanding it properly and learning the language. There is not one Wales - North, mid and South are different and you need to acknowledge those differences.

Overall, a very satisfied customer, it seemed, who says it is important to make the effort to integrate and respect the local language, customs and traditions as soon as you move here.

Natalie (Prion)

What are the chances? I had joined the annual Prestatyn Ramblers challenge of walking from Moel Famau to Prestatyn (21 miles) two years ago and as you do, walked and talked with fellow walkers and found that Natalie lived in Prion, next to Peniel, and since then we have gone on regular walks. She is a serious walker and in fact is doing her PhD on the subject (honestly) and our walks are academically and physically stimulating – and she is another of my ‘therapists’.

Born in Essex to parents who were WW 2 children – dad got evacuated to a public school and managed to complete his education whilst mum evacuated for a short time came back and “got educated whilst hiding under the desk during bombings in East End of London where they both lived”. Dad became a successful music teacher after studying at Royal Academy later whilst mum left school at age 14 and then held a number of jobs as administrative assistant/receptionist. Her mother, however, was a big reader and would borrow five books at a time and finish them quickly but then had to wait before getting more, says Natalie as Libraries in those days restricted how much could be borrowed. She imparted this interest to Natalie – her love of reading comes from her. (her father was a reader and introduced her to Dickens (his great literary passion) but it was her mother’s reading habits that stuck.) First of three children Natalie went to the local school and then to Girls Grammar School- “which I hated, I would not recommend all girls schools” but the education stood her in good stead, although she was quite rebellious, and she went to Warwick university to study German.

Her Welsh connection goes back to her father – her paternal grandma came from Oswestry and paternal grandpa from South Wales, and her uncle- father’s brother – lived in Dyserth, North Wales and which they used to visit for holidays. And then her parents, after retirement, moved to Clocaenog to be near Natalie and her family and spent the rest of their life there.

Natalie moved to Prion in 1988. After university she worked with a supplier of books to schools and libraries in Leamington Spa but says “I was dissatisfied with the company’s management and did not know what I wanted”. Whilst there she met Ron and when she got an offer to move to Chester as a store manager, they decided to move there. Money being tight, they could not find a house in Chester and so they extended their search and this brought them to Prion. A run-down barn was what they wanted, Ron being handy and an expert in wood and restoration, wanted something he could shape and the barn had land which they could use to indulge in their passion for gardening and growing stuff. The bliss was short-lived as she got transferred to Southampton on a promotion – with Ron in Prion and her down south she decided to resign and look for a job locally. She found one in Bodelwyddan castle as events manager, later trained as a counsellor, worked for Social Services and in a variety of counselling roles until she decided she wanted to be outdoors and became an organic vegetable farmer and ran her business.

They brought up Ron’s two children from a previous relationship and their two sons in Prion. Their two children who were born in Wales see themselves as Welsh, she

says. Although very happy here and now unable to think of living anywhere else, it was not always an easy journey. “When I used to go to the meithrenfa at the local school, I was aware of being an incomer, as all other mums spoke in Welsh” – her house is in a strong Welsh community – “and in my ignorance this surprised me”. The fact she was an outsider struck her forcefully when they found themselves on the front page of the local paper shortly after moving in. Seemingly the barn they had bought had got the outline planning permission on the basis that it was to be used by the local (Welsh) farmer’s son and when they submitted detailed plans after buying it, the planning committee were unhappy that the barn had then been sold on to outsiders (being lived in by the farmer’s son was not a condition of the planning). Natalie was shocked to read the headline that people from Leamington Spa were buying up Welsh homes! ‘But I hope after being here for 35 years and running small local businesses, we are no longer seen as fly-by-night exploiters of the housing market! At the time I just wanted to keep my head down and stay below the radar.’ The kids made her feel more Welsh as they participated in cultural activities, being musical and hence sought after at Urdds and Eisteddfods, and ‘although not sporty, when it comes to competitions I would support Welsh teams!’. Although she knew her Welsh neighbours socially, their friendships were largely with other English incomers – an English island in the Welsh community. She says “we were similar, as people who wanted rural lives, away from competitive capitalist societies in towns, to be with nature and basically have an alternative life style”.

What really made her Welsh was the landscape and walking, which she has always enjoyed since childhood and has fond memories of family holidays in Wales, the Lakes/Yorkshire and Peak district, a landscape with hills meant holidays. “I remember going back to Chipping Ongar (where she grew up) and thinking about how walking establishes us in a place. I realised that through walking Wales had entered her- “as I walked in Wales, Wales walked into me; I had absorbed it. I did not know it then and it was only in Chipping Ongar this fact struck me, that I had become Welsh. My connection was to do with the geography/landscape of Wales rather than the people”.

Her Welshness is partly due to her anti-English feelings –she is very critical and upset with the way England has treated Wales. She is pro-migration - “Wales has a complicated history, so many people have arrived from different parts of the world, going back thousands of years, all migration is a complex business. Who are we to say who should and shouldn’t be here?” Although she felt excluded in some situations when she first came, she realises now how important the Welsh language is and she was just unaware of this when she first arrived as a naïve 27 year old. “I didn’t understand why people would not just speak English if I was there, but I now think this was arrogant and typical ‘English incomer’ behaviour. I should have made an effort to learn Welsh.” She does not know what the answer is when it comes to the housing crisis with the growing population of second homers, since these provide jobs through tourism. She would, however, like Wales to come up with some radical plans to tackle the climate crisis -she does not believe that it can be left to Westminster, though it is a tricky one especially when it comes to sheep farming

which is an important part of Welsh identity. “How to balance the need for woodlands and biodiversity with sheep farming and grazing”, she wonders aloud.

“Although there was a Welsh connection through the family, I got here by chance, and I am glad I did. Wales is home now, partly as my children are Welsh, and partly because this is where I have spent most of my life.”

Jane (Nant Glyn)

I met Jane through the Nant Glyn Book Club – which Helen attends some times and where everything except the book is discussed (joke) but it is good fun.

Originally a Yorkshire lass, born to father from Kent and mum from Hull, she was born in Yorkshire where her father was a farm estate manager, and when she was six the family moved to North Wales- Trefnant – with her dad’s job and that is where she had her primary school education and then to Denbigh High School for secondary education and which was all in English with Welsh as a separate subject and which she continued till O levels, but has only ‘tipyn bach’ of Welsh now. She went travelling after O levels to Canada as a nanny and then came back to start working in a ceramic studio: “mum and dad persuaded their friend, the artist, to take me on” – so, she fell into ceramics by accident but later took it up seriously including holding her own exhibition. Her parents split up and she went to live with mum in St Asaph, till she took up with Geoff who was also working at the ceramics studio and together they set up their home in Staffordshire where Geoff came from, after marriage. Their three children were all born in Staffordshire and she continued the Welsh connection since her parents and two siblings were still here. In 1990 they moved to west Australia and after five years “Geoff was home sick and missed the UK weather, the Mediterranean climate in Perth did not work!” and they came back to UK, and to Wales- because “that is where my family was, Geoff’s parents had by then gone to Devon” and he resumed his work at the ceramic studio. After renting for a few months they found their home, with a small holding and woodlands in Nantglyn where they have been for over twenty years now. “When I was 40, and after a big project in Llandudno, I had enough of art and wanted to do a proper job” and went to train as a nurse at Bangor university and has since then worked in the NHS, most of the time in Denbigh infirmary and also served a term as a county councillor – ‘four years was enough’.

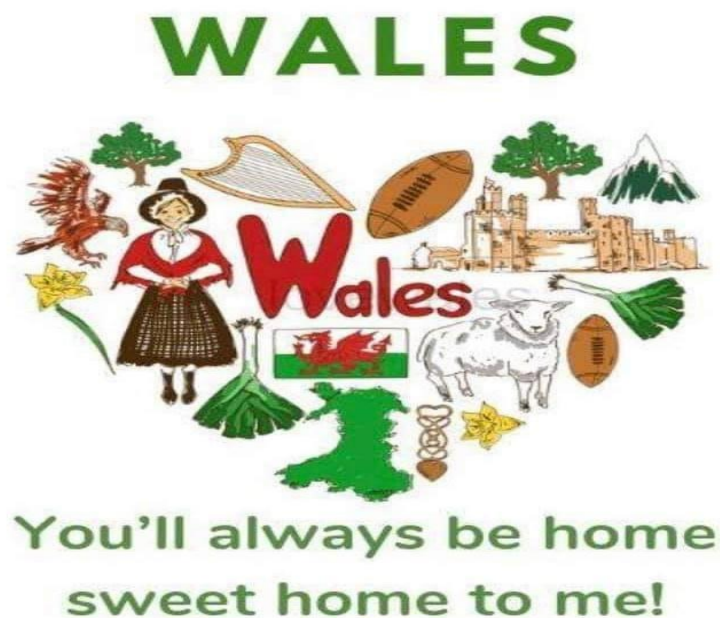
“I never thought about Wales when I was young, it was just where I lived, and living in the Vale of Clwyd and being around landowners and family, I was surrounded by the English; it was really when I went to the hill farms near Bala, with dad, that I met Welsh people”. And although she participated in Eisteddfodau she was not exposed to Welsh culture. Being a Protestant – dad was a church deacon but Jane is not very religious now – also limited her contact with Welsh people. “Although I am proud to live in Wales – it is a beautiful place and it’s my home, and I am very protective of it” she does not see herself as Welsh. One of her daughters, all three were educated via English, however, sees herself as Welsh and chose to come back to live in Bylchau to ensure that her daughter, Jane’s grand-daughter, was brought up in the Welsh culture. “I admire the Welsh; they take pride in their country and are patriotic.”

She did not face any discrimination: “because I do get on with people, but I do get the sense that when chips are down, it is us or them” and she narrated the experience of her niece who was involved in a fracas when her friends split up along Welsh and English lines. Nant Glyn was popular with professionals working in the North Wales Hospital and many of them were outsiders and this reinforced the Englishness, and which has not always gone down well with the Welsh people in the

area. “There was a council vacancy and the local Welsh folk pulled out all stops, wheeling people in to vote even, to ensure that it did not go to an English person” and things were unpleasant for a time. She recognises that music/language and their culture is important to the Welsh people and outsiders do not always show sensitivity and try and change things, and which causes disharmony. “The English resentment is passed on from generation to generation and gets reinforced’ and she is sad about that, and which then is not helped by the frustrations of locals who cannot afford homes problems, but she is not a fan of Welsh Assembly and feels that it might be better to have it all under Westminster.

Although we are in North Wales and which is what she knows, she thinks South and West Wales is the true Wales, and North is just the extension of northwest and Cheshire. She emphasises the need to promote the language and preserve the culture and says “I always feel like I am coming home when I am coming back from somewhere, I do not think of Yorkshire as home”. It is really the place- the beauty and nature which make it so for her- Welsh landscape is different, says she. She is aware that she is in an ‘English Island’ socially but professionally she engages widely and “am always being thanked for trying my few words of Welsh with patients, and sometimes I wish I should learn it properly” but with her other interests including riding and woodlands along with the job does not leave much time, she says. But “I feel that by the time I am old, I will probably turn Welsh”, the magic is working on her and whilst not giving up her English heritage she is becoming more aware of her Welshness!

And after our chat, she sends me this picture



The 'Bridge'

I have titled this section "Bridge" since the stories featured here are examples of people bridging different settings/cultures.

Susheela (as told by Phil, her husband and their daughter, Lal - Ruthin)

By the time I thought of asking her, it was too late- sadly, she had passed on. She had become my 'proxy' sister in Ruthin after she had adopted me when I came to live in Ruthin- she was pointed out to me as the resident 'Indian' when I arrived and even before I introduced myself properly, she had invited me over for dinner, and there was no stopping after that. Not sure, whether it was because she was the oldest of four girls and two brothers, and another little brother filled her caring instinct – and who was I to complain!

Susheela was born in Colwyn Bay in 1940 to Indian parents- all that is known about her mum is that her parents were on a pilgrimage when their newborn baby became ill and they left her at the Mission Hospital in Mysore so that the hospital workers could look after her for a few days until they returned. For whatever reasons they did not return and now an 'orphan' she was looked after by Ethel, a missionary woman who then brought the child, at age 3, to Wales to be looked after by Ethel's sister, Ida. However, Ida was unable to care for her full time being busy with her and Ethel's father's household needs, and so Susheela's mum was sent to Birmingham to be cared for by people known to the family via the Methodist church. Susheela's father, a Tamilian Indian, was adopted by a Methodist woman who was a teacher at girl's school in Madras (Chennai) and he came with her aged 15 to Wales and so his formative years were in India. Their marriage was 'arranged' through mutual connections in the Methodist church in Birmingham and given their backgrounds it was considered a good match and marrying 'outside' (especially as there were very few Indians in North Wales then) was not seen as a good idea. Her dad went away to serve during WW 2 and after he came back her parents ended up divorcing. Susheela and her three younger sisters stayed with mum, and became estranged from dad. Susheela went to a local school and then to the Grammar school in Abergele. Though Indian she was brought up in a 'British' family with British traditions; her parents, at the time, had little opportunity to practise their Indian culture.

Her divorced parents re-married, and as it happens to white partners- father married a girl from Hull and mum a businessman from Lancashire. Unbeknown to her, her father, after a stint working in Bhopal, India, lived not far from where she ended up living later in Hull. They did make up after nearly thirty years of estrangement, when she was in her early 40s, and Susheela learnt more about India from him.

Susheela studied at Wrexham Arts School and then did a Diploma in Teaching in Manchester- where she met Phil, a fellow student: "I saw her across a crowded class room, and that was it", says he after he went to study there from Sunderland; at heart he is a North East person, not a Geordie, he emphasises.

After marriage they were in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire before they arrived in Hull- Phil was a lecturer, and Susheela became a stay-at-home mum and they had

three children. During one of their holidays in Colwyn Bay, as they were visiting Susheela's grandmother: "we sat dangling our feet in running stream in an idyllic setting near Denbigh and began to wonder why we were living in the city (Hull)" and as work was not very stimulating, they started thinking of coming to Wales. By chance, Susheela found a job working with learning difficulties Advocacy Services and with their youngest child, Lal, decided to move to North Wales to explore this and Phil became a weekly visitor from Hull whilst waiting for release from his job at the College, where he had become a senior lecturer. Susheela's stint in Wales was cut short for practical and financial reasons; Phil's redundancy package two years later enabled them to take the plunge, and move permanently live in Llanrhaeddar and then Ruthin. Their two boys had started working by then and stayed over in Hull, and Lal came with them to Ruthin and started school locally. The idea of relocating to North East, Phil's home, was not seriously considered- it was seen as too cold whilst Colwyn Bay appeared warm, he remembers! It was a good move, the beautiful landscape, their house with views of the Clwydian Range in a nice village coupled with the fact that this meant that Phil could start working on his passion and which was music instrument making – the move allowed them to have space for his workshop. It was tough initially; he recounts that Lal used to tell her school mates that her parents were 'Dolis' as a joke!! (as they both signed on dole, with no jobs initially)- it was a bold move he recognises but was right for them and it worked out.

Susheela learnt Welsh in School and was brought up as a Methodist, but did not see herself as Welsh, instead describing herself as British Indian, and later took instructions and became Catholic, as is Phil who is also part Irish. In Wales, Susheela started working with Motor Neurone Disease Association. She initially became aware of Race discrimination after they moved to Hull, where she stood out in the 1980s (I was also in Hull later, nearly two decades after them, as a director of public health, and when it was still predominantly White), and started taking an active interest after some experiences in North Wales: "Why do not you go back to where you come from" and "Bet it is cold where you come from" Phil recalls. That led to Susheela starting the North Wales Race Equality Network and she worked hard to promote race equality- her efforts were recognised by invitations to the Garden Party and then conferred MBE at the Palace.

Neither a first language speaker, though she could hold basic conversation in Welsh, nor chapel going, Susheela was really an Indian in Wales. This was interesting since despite her desire to visit before, it was not till she was 68 that she was finally able to realise her lifelong dream to go there in 2009. Other family members had already visited, sending back pictures and videos, whetting Susheela's desire to go and find out for herself. Lal says: "both my grandmother and her daughters (Susheela and her sisters) firmly received the message that they had been 'saved' or 'rescued' from a fate worse than death, and were not encouraged to preserve or explore their Indian heritages, despite their own varying interests in doing so. Through the whitewashing of their cultural identities in a colonial-era of 'savourism' they had tragically received the idea that their Indian identities were off-limits." Susheela's visible difference in terms of her Tamil inheritance of dark South Indian skin tone meant that she stood out in an overwhelmingly white population regardless. She celebrated and practised both cultures, and indeed made the desserts including my favourite Indian ones whenever we had a dinner party. Phi says that they had good Welsh friends, participated in traditional functions like Eisteddfods and St David's Day and he does like 'caws' and 'barabrith'.

Wales to Susheela was home- because that is where she was born, and longed to be when the question came up in Hull, as both felt that Wales was more tolerant- “there is definitely an anti-English tone’ he acknowledges; interestingly, being part Irish, though White, he feels more accepted! Although he sometimes misses North East of England, he does not feel thwarted and is glad that they moved to Wales. He recognises that his views of Wales are based on personal experiences in the North. Lal is deeply proud of her Indian heritages, as well as her Irish minority ethnic identity, and the fact that 3 generations of her South Indian family have now been born in Wales since arrival 104 years ago. sees herself as Irish Indian! Lal has well documented Susheela’s story in some detail through her writings and films, and touches upon the issue of integration because as she says: “At a time when Wales is nationally reassessing its role both as having been oppressed but also having benefitted from involvement in the British Empire, both historically and as an ongoing legacy, it is important to reassess this family story with a decolonised lens as part of that wider reassessment.”

Gwyneth and Gaynor (with Craig – Denbigh)

To me, the two are inseparable – Gwyneth and Gaynor – the indefatigable ladies whom I met at Twm o'r Nant Theatre in Denbigh whilst visiting it for one of Helen's exhibitions a few years ago – and along with Craig, Gwyneth's husband whom I met later and discovered a lot in common with, they provided an ideal combination to help me rehearse the key themes I was discovering. So, we sat down after lunch one day.

Bit of context first: Gaynor (Morgan Rees) is the famous Welsh actress and is originally from the valleys in South Wales – from Abercwmboi, of Welsh parents: “My father went down the mines aged 12” and “I used to pass five coal mines on my way to my school”. She grew up in a Welsh speaking home and community and it is the ‘Adlais yn y galon’ to her. Her schooling was, however, in English largely: “I was given a choice of Welsh or French as a second language”, she laughs! She studied at the Rose Bruford Drama school in Kent– she was inevitably brought up in a dramatic and musical environment due to the eisteddfodau and the fact that her father was the conductor and director of the local Amateur Operatic Society: “every village had one” she says, and she remembers taking part in the productions, which were very elaborate with proper costumes. After her drama studies, she was awarded a BBC contract based in Bangor. “my parents only allowed me to move there, at age 21, on the condition that I stayed with one of our relatives”; being on their own as a single woman was not the done thing! She has been here in North Wales ever since but with regular trips to South Wales. She was one of the main and most popular characters in the longest-running soap opera produced by the BBC, Pobol y Cwm and remained with this Welsh-language soap for over 20 years. She remembers the valleys with great fondness and mentions with pride the Proclamation ceremony at Aberdâr in July this year, for the 2024 Eisteddfod. She has appeared in a number of well-known stage and television productions, in both English and Welsh. She moved to Denbigh over 40 years ago and where she met Gwyneth.

Gwyneth was born in Oswestry – “little Wales in England” and the family moved to Holywell when she was four years old. “I spoke in Welsh with my father and English with mother since she had been born and brought up in Liverpool – to Welsh parents;” and after attending Holywell Grammar School, she went to Bangor University to study amongst others, history, French and music; she then did a year of teacher's training and during this year, she met Craig, who had come over from California to do a PhD in Marine Biology. They met in 1964 and married the following year. Craig's mother was a proud Scott who had emigrated with her parents and three other sisters to settle in Montana. There, she met and married a Lakota Sioux Indian who was a half breed (as he described himself). He and his sister were removed from their reservation as children and placed in a US government boarding school where their Indian identity was crushed. Craig was born in a Sioux Indian reservation in North Dakota and subsequently lived in various US states, ending up in California. During his compulsory US military national service, he served in Puerto Rico, where he developed a keen interest in marine biology. Craig was very much

influenced by his Scottish mother's tales about Scotland; as a result of this influence and the then political climate in the US (McCarthyism and the hatred and violence arising out of the Civil Rights movement were rife) he decided to pursue his graduate studies in the UK. He chose Bangor because of its reputation in Marine Biology. He loved Bangor and his studies there and this love is maintained. For over 30 years he worked internationally for academic institutions, government bodies and UN agencies. Initially, Gwyneth (and later the two daughters) accompanied him but when their two girls were ready for secondary school, Craig and Gwyneth felt that they should establish a base where their girls could be brought up in a stable environment. The girls boarded at Howell's School in Denbigh for a year while Craig and Gwyneth decided on where to live in the UK; they bought their home in Denbigh so that the girls could have a permanent base and live at home. At Howell's, as president of the Parent Teacher Association she met Gaynor's husband and his daughter; they invited Gwyneth to an Easter gathering at their home – where she met Gaynor and the bond between them was established. Gwyneth then taught Spanish and French at Howell's and the family used to visit where ever Craig was posted at the time– they went 7 times to Myanmar, for example, and he would come over during his leaves.

I found much of common interest with Craig – I had worked in Minnesota, USA, and was aware of the American Indian history. We reminisce over our times in Burma (now Myanmar) where I had spent a few years as a child when my father was posted to Yangon, and Craig had worked there for four years; he loves hot curries – mine have not been hot enough for him! He protested that he had little to contribute to this exploratory project of mine but he did emphasise that deciding to buy the house and live in Denbigh was the best thing that they did.

So, a trio of a South Walian who made North Wales home, a North Walian and a Native American / half Scot, and this is what they had to say.

The two Gs recognise the importance of the Welsh language and are pleased that it now has political support; Gaynor has seen the comeback of Welsh in the valleys, with the introduction of more Welsh schools; she says now even English-speaking families want their children to learn Welsh- double the job prospects! Though the main language in school for G&G, their English stopped at the threshold of home and chapel. The latter figured importantly in both their lives. They both observed how women used to be treated differently – when Gaynor moved to North Wales and had to live with relatives or married women had to stop teaching.

I was particularly keen to hear about Gaynor's experiences, being from South Wales and living in North, but of course being a famous TV personality, her face was well known and all Welsh people 'claimed' her, and so she fits in everywhere in Wales! The differences between the north and south dialects and vocabulary did not bother her; in fact, she starred in the very popular Welsh television series 'Fo a Fe' which embraced and popularised the linguistic differences between north and south. Overall, their Welsh identities have been shaped by their homes and families, chapels, and the language – "of course Wales is a bilingual country, and all we are saying is that stop looking down on Welsh, have respect and empathy for the people

who wish to speak the language.” They feel that the Welsh language is a vital part of their identity. The value of the natural beauty of Wales is also in their blood.

They are both passionate about Wales and especially Denbigh and nothing much happens without their knowledge; they are both Plaid Cymru members and have been active in local politics at various levels, and have been championing the cause of Denbigh which does not get the recognition and support that Ruthin does; they take a keen interest in the national picture too. Buoyed by the recent successes of the Welsh sports teams which acts as a barometer of the national confidence in itself, Gaynor is feeling positive: “when they rise, Wales rises”, and so, “we will get there”, she says! Gwyneth recounts a story from her time in Dublin when a student (in the 1960s) when she was confronted by an Irish woman and asked “why does Wales not become independent like us? We are much poorer than you and we survive?” “We didn’t have the confidence in ourselves then,” Gwyneth remarks. And she was certainly not as strong in her views as her brother who used to call her “Saesnes fach” as most of her friends used to be non-Welsh speakers. Gaynor claims that England does not support Wales: “they do not even pay for our water and now the windfarms are coming up all over- once again Welsh natural resources being exploited by England...”

Gwyneth mused over her experiences of living in New Zealand – the same size population as Wales and in Mexico. “In Mexico there was an Anglo-American Directory, and I put my nationality down as Welsh, but I think I was the only one even though there were other Welsh people there. It was so much easier to say I’m English.”

It seemed that some of what we had been talking about was new to Craig, and he saw his visit to the Welsh settlement in Patagonia a long time ago in a different light now after hearing about the work we are doing with RICE, and had these last words for our session: “Wales has given me everything I wanted, the excellent education which led to an interesting career and family life” - and friends, reminds Gwyneth. He is very appreciative of Bangor University to the extent that he has sponsored eight Masters level studentships there. Whilst there may have been family ties for Gwyneth in terms of coming back to live in North Wales, for Craig it was the happy memories created when he was a doctoral student: “I like everything about Wales and its values; I wish to die here” – and we all hope not for a while yet, and to cheer us all up we got into the car to drive up to Llyn Brenig and drank deeply of the beauty, and the sun was shining.

Iain (Northwich and Rhewl, Llantysilio)

Given that he has a foot in both camps - home in Northwich and a woodland in Rhewl I wanted to hear his views. Iain and I met at work in Manchester nearly twenty years ago, and when I started having personal difficulties he became a great support – he would arrange regular hikes all across the Pennines, Lakes and Peak District, and my interest in hill walking and physical fitness, are due to him.

Born in Bristol in 1960s to a businessman dad – with Scottish roots and some Irish connections (he has fully researched and written his family history – which I read and found very interesting) and stay at home mum – from Bedford, Iain is the fourth of six children and went to local school and had a middle-class upbringing. Growing up, he was aware of the people across the Bristol Channel, but “I did not know anything about the Welsh and remember that there was rivalry between the English and the Welsh, but we did not go to Wales.” After schooling he went to Lancaster University, and then went to work with Ernst & Young as an accountant, and settled in Cheshire. He later switched to the NHS in late 1990s, and which is where we met. In between he married Margaret, a librarian, whose father is Hungarian who left Hungary during the 1956 uprising, and they have three children. So, theirs is quite an international family and which has helped them with Brexit - between his Celtic and Margaret’s Hungarian connections, they all have ‘second nationalities’ (passports!) and are freer to travel and work in Europe, which is handy as one of their sons lives in Berlin (and in another international extension is marrying a girl from USA)!

Iain is really into outdoors pursuits and has done orienteering, mountaineering, hiking, cycling across UK and Ireland, and his interest in Wales started when they shared, with Margaret’s parents, a static caravan in Valle Crucis, near Llangollen, spending holidays with the children and doing the usual family activities all over North Wales. He also became interested in woodlands and ended up buying and managing a small plot – the local farmer has been very helpful and gave Iain a hand with sorting it out including fencing the boundary. Later on, when the Valle Crucis caravan sharing arrangement came to an end, they bought a second-hand caravan and brought it to the woodland and refurbished it. There are restrictions on the use of caravans in woodlands – owners can only spend 28 days a year – although this meant that they could not stay over very often, with the children on way to senior schools and the basic facilities putting the family off (*sic*), it became Iain’s ‘mancave’. “Coming to Wales and to the wood would calm me down after the long and sometimes hectic hours at work.” Nothing like chopping logs to work off stress, and which he uses for their log burner in the caravan as well as his home, and he also has a guaranteed supply of Christmas trees from his woodland.

Set in a beautiful setting, looking across at the Berwyn mountains, the location has another essential perk nearby – the Sun Inn, still untouched by the modernisation (*sic*) affecting pubs, with its rather rural small informal setting, provides the social sustenance. “Local farmers would meet there over a pint, and speak in Welsh. This encouraged me to start learning it. I am not fluent but I can do some basic stuff now, and do not understand when people say it is a difficult language - I find it quite musical”, but of course with his international background, he is used to languages. It

was not just the language since “I found the people to be authentic, I tend to have an anti-snob attitude, and which I find off-putting in some English circles, and hence I warm to the Welsh point of view,” he adds.

Leaving the caravan unattended is a risk everywhere, unless things can be secured down, they can/do walk, but “I have friendly farm neighbours – They shoot pheasants in the wood and in turn they keep an eye out”

Iain is in favour of independence for Wales – whilst he understands people’s views for devolution but remaining in the union, he does not think that Westminster will ever ‘favour’ Wales. “There are many small countries in Europe and there is no reason Wales can’t also be independent and thrive.”

Of course, the landscape and nature have played a big part in his interest in Wales, and which he believes will become more important as he sees more people, and especially younger ones, becoming more interested in these issues. He is therefore keen to see more effort going into protecting nature and supporting local communities. He mentions The Sun Inn which remains open, despite having only a small, cosy bar area, and relatively few customers, the current landlord lives in the pub, which keeps it open. Although he is aware of some of the history of Wales including local stuff - he remembers coming to North Wales Hospital (Denbigh Mental Hospital) during his early career as an accountant - and on our regular walks in North Wales he would look up and point out the historical features, he is always keen to learn more. He was very interested to hear about our recent visit to Yr Ysgwrn and Llyn Celyn (and Tryweryn) and has put it on his To Do List with Margaret, understanding and respecting locals including their language is important to him.

Visitors

Raman (Mumbai)

Younger by three years, and yet contrary to the Indian tradition has been the older brother as he shouldered the family responsibilities back in India while I set off for greener pastures as soon as I could after finishing my studies.

He has been visiting UK regularly and both his children studied in London, and are now in India and New Zealand. He and his wife came for a holiday with me to North Wales – they had been to South Wales for professional reasons in the past- a few years ago when we stayed in Betws y Coed for a few days and did the usual sightseeing with train up to Snowdon (did not fancy walking!) and on way back to Manchester, where I was living in those days, we stopped at Ruthin Castle for lunch.

He was pleased when I told him about my decision to settle down in Ruthin area, and came over for the House warming party, and impressed everyone with his culinary skills. I used to spend a lot of time back in India for many years, staying with our mother, and which also relieved Raman, who was the primary carer otherwise, and during these visits, much as I loved them both, I used to come back after 4-6 weeks, due to the lack of ability to properly walk in Mumbai, and more importantly the fresh air. We both used to comment on it.

He also got to know Cefyn well, and hosted him in Mumbai so that Cefyn could talk to the artists there about his plans for forging links between Wales and India. Raman has been the Chair of Association of British Scholars, Mumbai having been a Chevening Scholar himself and also has an interest in arts – given his daughter studied art at Central St Martin's in London. He and I had been thinking about building further links between India and Wales especially after going to some of the events held in Mumbai as part of the Cymru in the City tour in 2019.

Impressed with the natural beauty, and having met some of my friends, Raman has been actively promoting Wales to his friends, and last year came back with a friend, Ashok, who lives in Dubai. Ashok has also had high powered jobs and is well travelled internationally, but the joys of small things they experienced here were something else– fresh air, being able to get out for walks (imagine the difference with Dubai, a concrete jungle), and helping with the allotment- I made them pick, and shell peas, and berries.

This is how he see Wales: “A place where you can rediscover 'who you are at your own pace with no pressures of a city life as you walk around admiring and absorbing the pristine nature and fresh air.’

Arvind (New York)

A school mate, who moved to USA after his initial stint in the UK, as happened to a lot of us faced with the challenges of making it in the NHS as foreign doctors, we have stayed in touch over the years. I have been a regular visitor to USA and used to enjoy his hospitality in New York. Getting older, with life speeding up, we started walking together and explored the usual spots in Patagonia, Machu Pichu, American national parks and Dolomites before the pandemic struck.

During the pandemic, I became more aware of how privileged we are to be living in this area, surrounded by so much natural and outstanding beauty, and I would often share videos/photos during the lockdowns with him. Arvind is very restless and is constantly on the move – he loves travelling and hiking (only one in my circles to have done the Grand Canyon rim to rim in one day) and keeps hatching plans for future trips. I, on the other hand, have almost lost the desire to travel and am becoming more interested in local nature – the hills and mountains within striking distance of Ruthin in North Wales seem plenty to me! It took a lot of convincing, and some ‘fall outs’ as I refused to go on further exotic trips – while he carries on travelling worldwide – and he finally came over last year.

Although he had lived and worked in Cardiff in the 1980s as a young doctor, he had not seen much of Wales and any way not North Wales – so it was an experience for him. Walking over from World’s End to Dinas Bran and in the Carneddau mountains made him realise why he had lost his friend (me) for any future foreign hikes! He saw the beauty of the place and the hold it had on me!

Barbara (North Carolina)

A dear colleague from the past who now lives in North Carolina and has a ‘cabin’ (the typical American under-statement – her cabin is a nice house on massive acreage in reality) in the mountains there with moon-shine distilling neighbours - Barbara does know a thing or two about nature and beauty.

We met over 30 years ago at work, and then went separate ways- I moved jobs within the UK and she moved jobs across the world. She has done a lot of developmental work in health internationally and worked and lived in exotic places like Costa Rica, before finally retiring and going back to her roots in the USA.

After the pandemic, she came over with her partner, Rod to visit and spend a week travelling around North Wales. The seaside, mountains, hills and of course the moors – Helen is passionate about Denbigh moors and every visitor has to drive through it – were on the one hand small compared to what exists in America, and on the other hand had their own beauty; size is not everything! And then, like most Americans, Rod was struck by the history in Europe. Wales goes back such a long time and they found it very interesting, and were curious about Edward the First and his castles as we sat in the café at Harlech castle one afternoon. Sadly, there were no music, poetry or cultural events during their visit – the Medieval banquet which used to be a regular feature at Ruthin Castle Hotel, and which Barbara visited years ago, is a very hit and miss affair now. But the nature and hiking more than compensated for this lack, she wants me to emphasise, and they liked the ‘Welsh Rabbit’ – Rarebit!

Finally (Manchester)

And then there was the South Manchester Muslim Walking group, led by Amir Hannan, a friend from my old work days in Manchester, who came for a hike and I will just let him tell us about it- this is what he had sent for publication in the Friends of Clwydian and Dee Valley AONB Newsletter

“ Ruthin to Moel Famau - A memorable walk

We arrived with families and children- the youngest member being Khadhija, aged 6 years, wearing her coronation T-shirt - for the walk to Moel Famau with Rajan and Tony as our walk leaders. We all met in the car park in Ruthin and started our 12 miles hike and saw some breath-taking views of the countryside as we began to climb up. It was a gruelling experience even for some of our more experienced walkers. As we climbed up the mountain, it seemed to give more and more, encouraging us to keep going, the excitement ever increasing. It was a battle of hearts and minds as we helped each other along to the top - *if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together;* and what a sight that was to behold, not to mention the sense of achievement.

Lunch was very enjoyable as we took in the stunning views; and there was an opportunity for us to pray too.

On the way back we enjoyed the small lake and then walked through the field of bluebells in Coed Ceunant – which blew us away, magical.

Passing through Ruthin we saw some wonderful old houses and streets, and even gate-crashed a Coronation street party. The children’s faces sum up what we all felt at the end- happy with a real sense of achievement; Tony and Rajan were glad too!

Thanks for the work you do for the AONB which offers great enjoyment and physical and mental health benefits. As practising GPs, my wife Shahla and I cannot emphasise enough the value of nature and exercise, and hope more people will make use of what the area has to offer. We plan to come back in the future.

To find out more about our Group please visit:

southmanchestermuslimwalkinggroup.com, we welcome everyone. “

Fy Nghymru

Anuk Arudpragasam, in his book: 'A passage north', set in Sri Lanka, describes the journey of the protagonist dealing with loss: "It had been in those months of waiting probably that he'd first become aware of the absence inside him, the longing for a life that existed beyond the boundaries of the Colombo and Sri Lanka that he knew, an absence that he had not felt as an absence so much as a kind of willingness to be drawn elsewhere, an absence that made him, paradoxically, more present to the world around him, more delicately aware of its surfaces and textures and moods."

He goes on: "What he had felt at the time was not so much desire as a kind of yearning, for though both desire and yearning were states of incompleteness, states involving a strong, sometimes overwhelming need for something outside one's life, what was called desire always had a concrete object, a notion of what was necessary to eliminate the absence one felt inside, whereas to have what was often called yearning was to feel this absence and yet not know what one sought. To desire, in a sense, was to know or think one knew what one wanted, to know or think one knew the paths by which it might be reached, even if these paths turned out to be too difficult to follow, even if the things they led to, the things one desired, turned out not to provide the liberation one sought. To yearn, on the other hand was to be lost, to lack bearings in the world because one did not know what one was seeking or where it could be found, so that unable to distract oneself by frenetic activity or single minded pursuit, from the painful sense of lack, one's only consolation was to look out across vast distances, as if surely somewhere in the expansiveness of the horizon, across space and sea and sky, some possibility was contained that could make life self-sufficient and devoid of need, some possibility that could bring an end to time. "

The 'possibility' that could 'make life self-sufficient' was what brought me to Wales, to find a new meaning, to make a new start. Like the protagonist above I was lost and had no idea what it (the possibility) would be. Wales with its mountains, hills and sea, certainly offers the geographical expansiveness, but will I find 'it'?

My Wales is rather a restricted place geographically, since I know only a small part of North-East Wales, and the people I know may or may not be typical. Talking to friends is part of the process of the discovery, both external and internal - not to do a scientific study or analyse what they said; after all every person is unique and everyone must make sense for themselves, but rather to see, as much as possible without intruding, how they did so. More than the specifics, it was the journeys, their thought processes and how they understand what I began to see as my land, my country. By the way, I should acknowledge that it is not just the people whose stories have featured in this essay who have been a part of my journey, there have been many others who have helped me, for example Llifon, born in Waunfawr and living in Denbigh with his wife – Delyth- for last 37 years, and both being teachers, who is my golf partner and where I get "Dwy mewn un fel dw l'n ymarfer fy Nghymraeg pan dan ni chwarae golff!"; Lois, the young girl in Ruthin library, who took pity on my IT incompetence and helped me with organising the RICE activities; Beryl, my piano teacher, who has infinite patience with an unteachable pupil and especially as the

lessons often meander into other areas with me trying my Welsh language rather than concentrate on piano, but we have a laugh; and Alison and David or Mary and Graham who nourish both of us, Helen and I, physically (*sic*), and intellectually; and the list goes on, every time I tried to stop writing this section I would remember another one who has helped me!

People migrate for various reasons, my parents were refugees from what became Pakistan after the British partitioned it, I was partly an economic migrant -seeking a better life, and migrated again to Wales for personal reasons.

Whether they are running away from something or find themselves there naturally by birth or due to some necessity, Wales does work. It did, for and on my friends; as Natalie said: "as I walked it, Wales walked into me." It grows on you - it is none of the usual things: religion, security, lifestyle, language, natural beauty, the poetry, on their own but an amalgam of these in various quantities and combinations – the intangible which can neither be described specifically nor adopted or transplanted in someone. It is something that must be experienced, and it does not come all at once, it comes slowly, in an unplanned/unplannable way, from chance encounters.

Chance certainly played a big role in my journey - I had almost decided on moving to the Shetland Islands, which is where I had my first NHS job when I came to the UK as a young doctor in 1980 – the strong winds and wilderness there mirrored the storms in my head, but the logistics especially given the need to spend time in India where my mother and siblings were living precluded that. I had to be within commuting distance of Manchester airport, but out in the countryside somewhere.

Cyfle

*Mae angen un cyfle weithiau
Pa un, anodd i deud ar y pryd
Mae hi'n gwneud synnwyr dim ond nes ymlaen
Pam wyt ti'n aros
Gwneud naid a ddim meddwl gormod
Bethau gorau yn digwydd gan cyfle*

As a tourist I had been struck by the North Wales landscape; Yorkshire Dales, Pennines, Peak and Lake districts did not have the same appeal for me. The search took me all over North Wales and in the end, sheer pragmatism influenced the choice, as I was able to find a move-in, affordable, lock up and leave, place to rent while I recovered my balance - based under Moel Famau, a flat with wide and long ranging views from the balcony, sleeping under a skylight in the small loft bedroom, within walking distance of coffee shops and the library, and the ability to just walk out of the accommodation for long rambles or trips to India, provided the opportunity to explore the 'expansiveness of the horizon, across space, and sea and sky'.

Ruthin, North Wales

*Place to rest and recuperate
Country air, walking, fresh food*

Time to reflect and review
Remembering good times, counting blessings
Chance to re-energise for the future
Practise mindfulness, meditation, morality
Just what is needed
For the body and soul

Hill walking

Physical and mental
Joys of walking
Making me fit
Keeping me sane
On hills and moors
Alone often
Company sometimes
Pounding miles
Breathing deeply
Thinking clearly
Talking infrequently
Just being
With elements
The call of outdoors
Hard to resist
Mother Nature's bounty
Get out there
As long and as often
And feel for yourself

I also discovered the Ramblers Association and started walking regularly with the various local groups to explore the area and made many good friends; the volunteer walk leaders do an amazing job - John (Kelly), an Englishman from Southern England who moved up north in much later life, completed 1000 walks for the Vale of Clywd Ramblers Group as a leader two years ago, and when he was 80 years old. Take him anywhere in the hills blindfolded, spin him around and ask him to find his way back, and he could do it! The terrain and beauty, along with the camaraderie always brought a smile and spring in the steps, the black dog would lose its grip. Later, I joined the Clwydian and Dee Valley AONB Partnership Group and their Friends Group – and which opened up my eyes to further riches and the history of the area; another John (Roberts) who has been associated with the AONB for a long time has become my go to person whenever I need information about nature and history, and there is a buzz here about the potential establishment of a national park. To many, it is about time- obviously Offa's Dyke is the most well-known landmark but there are so many others, not to forget the Horseshoe Falls near Llangollen and the world heritage famous Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, for example, and the Denbigh Moors, our favourite.

During one of the coffee stops at the Ruthin Craft Centre I went to Cefyn's studio there and we got talking, and there was much to talk about especially about India

which he knew extremely well having been a frequent traveller there for many years. In fact, he had seen more places there than I have, and had lots of tales to tell of travelling in packed buses/trains, 'chai' and food and how to deal with mosquitoes! I had already become aware of the long-standing historical connections between North-east India and Wales, from the time Rev Thomas Jones had gone there as a missionary in 1840s – Nigel Jenkins' book: 'Gwalia in Khasia' describes this well – and which had prompted me to start the Ruthin India Cultural Exchange (RICE - <https://ruthinindiaculturalexchange.com/>) initiative to celebrate the shared history and build on it. It has been fascinating to see how many people locally have an Indian 'connection' through family, friends, work, or as visitors. With the help of Ruthin Library, who provided a free venue, for the occasional get-togethers, we held events to discuss Indian writers, Bollywood cinema and Yoga; the laughter yoga sessions went well, though it was not easy for some people to drop the 'reserve', along with talks by Cefyn who described his annual visits to India between 1994-2005, and Brian who drove there in 1970s as part of the Hippie generation. I then discovered that Brian was not alone, some others had done the same journey; could their 'awakening' on the trips have played a part in why they live in Wales? Their stories used to take me back to my youth in Delhi in late 1960s/early 1970s when as a student I used to see these 'strange' people arriving in Connaught Place on the Magic Buses (cheap rides from Europe) or in their own vehicles of all types, and used to wonder about their lives, and whether I would travel some time, and see the world. I also wondered if Brian and my paths may have crossed in Delhi – if they did, then it would have been one sided as being rather shy in front of foreigners and especially the 'Hippie' crowd with their wonderful clothes – fashions which we tried to imitate, and yes, I wore bell-bottom trousers – and lifestyles which were beyond my ken, I would have just smiled and walked on.

Over time as one thing led to another, and it started becoming apparent, though I still had a long way to go, that Wales was not bad (*sic*), I took the plunge and bought my home in Llanbedr DC, under Moel Fenlli – the main criteria, apart from suitable accommodation including for visitors, was that it should be walkable to town! And near a bus stop for when I am old and not able to drive, reminds Helen, who also came along soon after and added yet another dimension to my journey of discovery of Wales and myself, and the healing. My life had found a rhythm; quarterly trips to India (yes, much to my shame now, I contributed to the climate damage as a frequent flyer) to see mum and family for a few weeks and then back to Wales to recover – the overwhelming sensual assault with sounds, sights, smells and crowds along with the thick pollution in Mumbai after a few weeks was not enough to compensate for the motherly love, and I would hanker to get back to my green hills and for fresh air.

Home

*The car turns off the motorway
bringing me back from the airport
down winding minor roads
and before long the hills appear
overlooking home down in the valley*

*the heart soars, tiredness of journey gone
 pelting rain only adds excitement
 oh, how do I miss thee
 the green, green Vale of Clwyd*

Then the pandemic struck; but with the Welsh woman- Helen - by my side and our beautiful region, we tried to make the most of it.

Use the time well

*For catching up
 with jobs not done
 For making up
 with lost friends and family
 For tending to self
 physically and mentally
 No putting off stuff anymore
 Things must be done*

*There was no guarantee
 of seeing another day
 It was thus, is, will be
 Use every moment
 now more than ever
 love, laugh, give thanks, help needy
 connect and be part of the whole
 before going down in the hole*

Living in rural North Wales was a new experience for me anyway, having lived in cities in the past, but the pandemic made me discover the joys of nature, and realise how privileged I was:

Countryside living lessons

*Lambs bleating, sheep baaing
 occasional neigh with horse rider and dogs
 woodpecker on tree, sparrows chirping, and the cockerel
 the distant drone of tractor and the muck spreader on the fields
 and the list grows as she keeps pointing out on daily permitted walk
 never realised how 'noisy' the countryside is, but isn't that lovely
 senses being woken up uncluttered by the city sounds
 Tomorrow's lesson will be local wild flowers
 walking through 'primroses lane'*

Later on, we collated a photographic anthology of our favourite things during the pandemic; the joys of small things (<https://www.ramareflections.com/pdfs/Joys-of-small-things-part-two-memorable-moments.pdf>). I also then came across the saying by Sant Dewi: "Gwnewch y pethau bychain" – do the small things; things that make a real difference. Helen and I used to have a laugh as I would be going on about the

state of the world and the injustices whilst she would get on with gardening and household tasks, and looking after friends.

Our plans to visit the Shetland Islands, given my 'obsession' with the place, were dashed by the pandemic; I really wanted to go there to mark the 40th anniversary of my arrival in the UK. However, since we could not go there, Helen brought Shetland to me! Alison and David gave us their cottage in Harlech for a stay during the break in the pandemic lockdown, and Helen managed to convince a kind lady in Lerwick to pack a bagful of sand, with crushed shells and sea-weed, from the beach in Lerwick town and send it to her, and which was presented to me on the day. The calm weather on the beautiful Harlech beach, with the castle in the background, that day was a far cry from the stormy, wind-swept, Shetland of my memories, but perhaps a better representation of the change taking place internally.

With Helen's help I took the opportunity to learn more about the area. We travelled around - sometimes with our visitors to the usual tourist spots, and often on our own; once Helen made a list of all the villages in Denbighshire and we drove around in stages to see them all! One night, I decided to take a long route back from Helen's house in Peniel to mine in Llanbedr; driving past old farms strewn with discarded farm machinery under a moon-lit sky and then through the woods on windy roads I kept imaging the dragons coming at me! With not a soul or another car on the way till I hit the outskirts of Ruthin via Cyffylliog I began to see the old Wales as depicted in Mabinogion!

Going into Blaenau Ffestiniog area took me back to a holiday there long time ago when we heard about the lives of the miners underground (and the lives of the mine owners, Baron Penrhyn, above ground) and their poetry, operatic societies, and mini eisteddfods; in the depths of the earth, these hard working miners found time to enjoy despite harsh lives of misery. Although I had already read some of the works of poets like Dylan Thomas (Do not go gentle into that good night) and Gillian Clarke (Lament), and Leisure by William Davies remains one of my favourite poems (who I felt was speaking to me, cautioning me, when he wrote it:

*"A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare"),*

it was Karen Owen who I met later who educated me about Welsh poetry. She took me to Aberystwyth, we visited the National Library and toured the area, as part of my education about the Welsh psyche and poetry; of course, I had to have the obligatory picture taken under the Cofiwch Dryweryn sign. Although I could not (and still cannot) understand the Welsh language properly and certainly not the Cynghanned metre I just love to hear her recite poetry – it is so musical.

Unable to do anything to help directly with the pandemic - not for want of trying - and although we raged and ranted about the mismanagement and the sheer arrogance of the politicians (Westminster), we filled our time with recording our observations and which was also a way to keep in touch with friends and families. Here are some examples: a poetry anthology (https://www.ramareflections.com/pdfs/Reflections-during-COVID19-lockdown_A-poetry-diary%20RajanMadhok.pdf) ; experiences of

our friends of living through the first year of the pandemic (<https://www.ramareflections.com/pdfs/Our-lives-during-2020-an-anthology-pdf-March-2021.pdf>) and a daily record of my 67th year (<https://www.ramareflections.com/pdfs/Life-during-pandemic-in-2021-by-Rajan-Madhok.pdf>) . I have a strong interest in history of medicine and felt that personal stories are more important than 'official' records - I certainly found Daniel Defoe's account of the plague (even though as it transpires, it was fiction) provided a better insight. I have offered all these to the National Library in Aberystwyth as part of their Covid archives, as well as to the NHS archives at the British Library.

Grow up

*Frontline healthcare workers battling against odds
 Poor daily wage workers starving without work
 Scientists running against clock to stop the onslaught
 Families mourning losses made harder with isolation
 Supply workers and technicians running essential services
 What do you know of the fear, sadness, anger
 taking shelter in your rural abode, complaining of inconveniences*

VC day

*Not killable, must be made liveable
 victory over Corona, my a**e
 just like peace, hunger, poverty eh
 so bloody clever, aren't you*

Five years later, my journey is ongoing, we have survived the pandemic and gone through the treatment for Helen's cancer (<https://www.ramareflections.com/pdfs/Helens-cancer-diary-2022.pdf>), and I am discovering more joy in Wales.

The RICE programme has had a great fillip with the help of Late Mair Jones; she decided to donate her harp to celebrate and promote musical exchanges between north-east India and Wales. Cefyn and Ann then raised funds with help of Mair's friends, and Meinir and Wyn from Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias, where I had become a trustee, agreed to take this on as a project starting with providing harp lessons to students in Shillong. The Vice-Chancellor of Martin Luther Christian University in Shillong, Lily, came over and we held a ceremony at Nant Clwyd y Dre to mark the start. I am happy to be working with Cefyn to build on Mair's legacy; in addition to the musical exchange programme, Cefyn is doing his own work and capturing and celebrating the links through drawings and weaving – his second exhibition to tell the story of Khasi Hills and Wales is currently on at the Storiel in Bangor, and he has drafted me (*sic*) to explore further links in health and nature given my appointment as an adjunct faculty at the Indian Institute of Public Health in Shillong. There is growing interest from Wales Art International about these developments, and there is a lot of local support.

Helen is very interested in old houses and we are forever trooping around to see them, the Open Doors days when the houses are opened by the owners for visitors sees her first in the queue sometimes, and every time we drive around she will point them out. She is busy photographing old places and uploading them on a website dedicated to old buildings in Britain; it was fascinating to visit the local churches: Llangynhafal, Llangywfan, Llanynys, Llandyrnog and Llanrhaedar one afternoon, and to realise what an important, historically, area we live in. She is rather upset that Denbigh does not get the recognition or the support it deserves, given that it has the greatest numbers of old buildings- it is always Ruthin, she complains.

The history and natural beauty of Wales gets regularly reinforced through the eyes of my visitors. There have been some visitors though not as many as was planned; I have been exploring options of attracting Indian visitors here - I am disappointed that so many Indian tourists come to the UK and end up doing the circuit of London, Windsor, Stafford upon Avon, Lake District and Edinburgh, and just bypass this jewel of a place. I was very happy to attend some of the events for the Cymru in the City Festival in Mumbai, India few years ago, and it was an opportunity for me to learn more about Wales, since I was a new arrival here at the time. The literature and arts which were the feature of the festival made me proud- it was in Mumbai that I saw the film about Hedd Wynn and it was only recently that I finally visited Yr Ysgwrn. Then, there is so much local history and archaeology – the recent talks about Henllan Street in Denbigh, one of the most (in) famous streets in the 19th century where even the policemen went in pairs and yet a thriving community and industry (leather), and Denbigh is the home of Thomas Gee, the renowned publisher, for example; and the talk by ‘Cadvas’ about the archaeology around Corwen, a place associated with Owain Glyndwr, have been fascinating.

One would have thought that the lockdown and cancer were enough but life had not finished testing me yet, and so just before Christmas in 2022 a pipe burst in the loft and the bungalow got damaged and needed complete gutting, and almost a year later it is still not sorted. Much as I hate being critical, I will make an exception since the repair job has been badly managed – not a helpful company, and has lost me another year when I would have had visitors. Hey ho. The positive way to look at things is that at least I am in Wales with all that it has to offer.

As I am writing this section, I have come back from a hike up towards the Glyders, from Capel Curig, with Tony, an area that I have been fascinated by since I read the ‘I bought a mountain’ book by Thomas Firbank. Tony being an ex-RAF pilot loves it. We saw some of the low flying planes on exercises from RAF valley, and I could see the wistfulness in his eyes as he recalled his younger days doing those runs, sweeping in low and turning around the mountain; but he, and I, were equally happy on land, on top of the mountains savouring nature’s bounty. As an aside I missed the first two runs as I was looking into the sky whilst these planes were down in the valley, and we were high up! As Jim Perrin says in his book: ‘The hills of Wales’: “If heaven were ever to take a physical form, these hills of Wales would be an apt model for it.”

I agree totally, I certainly feel that I am in heaven. *Fy Nghymru ydy'r fy adre rwan* – I have come home. In stating this I am in good company with Jan Morris who said: "I am emotionally in thrall to Welshness," she said. Although Morris fiercely supported Wales and all it stands for, she recognized that she had adopted her country; she wasn't wholly of it. Wales, for Morris, was both a place to discover and a place to define.

I do not think I can define Wales but I certainly feel that there is something precious here and which needs to be celebrated and protected, and hence I will take some liberties in the next section.

Fy Nghymru: Y Dyfodol (The Future)

I grew up in a joint family household in Delhi – four generations living together with my paternal great grandfather, grandparents, my uncle – dad’s younger brother, and our family with mum and dad and four of us children. After leaving Pakistan during the partition, as they were Hindus, these refugees had settled in Delhi where I was born and brought up surrounded by the tales of displacement – my grandparents never got over what they had left behind, though my great grandfather who was the head of the family and a businessman and had lost everything was more stoic - and continuing reminders of loss. When I was much older, I decided to travel to Pakistan and see the places where my family came from. It was a very moving experience to visit Gujranwala (where my father’s family came from, I could not go to Lyallpur – now Faisalabad where mum came from; as an aside Rishi Sunak’s family also hails from Gujranwala!). I came back to Mumbai and told mum all about it - dad was long dead by then – and asked her whether she would like to visit there; I was taken aback at her vehement No, she had no desire to travel to the past. On the one hand, understandable given what she had to go through as a 14 years old when the family fled their home during the partition, and on the other hand, incomprehensible as I was searching for what was lost and looking for answers in the past. Past can explain but it cannot, and should not, define you, is what I took away from that. And that is how I feel about Wales.

I know that I will not be seen as a Cymro (yet!) – but I am claiming the right to comment on Wales! I certainly do not know enough although I do try and keep up with the developments about the future of Wales including in the recent essays in ‘Welsh Plural’ book, for example. So, what I am going to say is from the heart, but since I do not want to over-reach, I will restrict myself to a few things as follows.

Yes, Wales has been dealt harshly over the millennia, with constant wars and invaders, and as Ceinwen, and others, says a rather hostile neighbour in England. But its story is no different to what happened elsewhere globally; from Aborigines in Australia, Maoris in New Zealand, American Indians, Incas in Peru and so on where the so-called civilised world destroyed ancient cultures, or indeed in India. Those societies and cultures were far wiser than our generations, something that we wish we had now as we try and deal with relentless destruction of the planet and widening inequalities with gross misuse of power and capital; these societies had the right fundamental organisational principles. Just look at the American Indians who could not understand the White man’s obsession with acquiring land since they did not believe that they owned land anyway, rather it was the land that ‘owned’ them; a philosophy of harmony with and respect for the nature which was also mirrored by the Incas in South Americans who worshipped the goddess: Pachamama (Earth mother).

What I am proud of is that despite all the attempts over the last two millennia to subjugate and obliterate it, Wales and the Welsh are still here – Yma o Hyd; the various protests at their peak in 1950-60s never really became violent like across in Ireland. Owain Williams (of Tryweryn fame), like Kate Roberts’ character, gets frustrated by his compatriots for not starting a revolution despite being oppressed.

And as someone said to me once: Wales has never tried to take military action against others – always the defender, not the attacker. So, it is not in the nature of Welsh to revolt, easily, and instead they have relied on their ‘Welshness’, and which is the fundamental organisational principles embodied in the hard work, persistence and resilience borne out of non-conformism (the spirit and not the religion) and humanity, and which in turn comes from its natural beauty and resources. This is what it needs to hold on to, desperately and fiercely. “What does not break you, makes you stronger” and to my mind, it is places like Wales that hold the future of humankind in their hands. Jon Gower sums up in his book: ‘The story of Wales’: “Wales remains both a country and a conundrum, where British-ness and Welshness often tussle, or prove interchangeable. It is a nation small enough to hold out the promise of being understood, yet large enough to always have more to discover around every corner.”

I am not party political, and the only way I can deal with politicians is to recognise that they have a job to do (*sic*) – sadly, increasingly, the world over, the job is not about doing the right thing for the populations but for the party and mostly personally (I do not buy the servant of the people myth), and feel increasingly strongly about the power imbalance between Wales and Westminster. I have been struck by the Anti-English theme and support for Welsh Independence amongst some of my friends, and then there are other voices: “we must not forget that Wales was backward” – the writings of Caradog Prichard and Caradoc Evans being quoted to substantiate these claims – and pointing to the wider introduction of education by the English, or how the chapels kept back the Welsh people. My own view, for what it is worth, is that there is little benefit in looking back all the time, we must move forward. Being anti-English only reinforces the problem, we need mutual respect. “Abersoch is no different to a lot of other places for rich people now- it is how it is, sadly”, Helen says: and “What is needed is more diversity and equality.”

In any case, as a nation Wales remains divided – not just by language but culturally with various parts: North, South, and West being different in many aspects, and this has been used over the years by politicians. Jon Gower quotes Bevan in a speech to the Commons in 1946: “There has been too great a tendency to identify Welsh culture with Welsh speaking..... What some of us are afraid of is that, if this psychosis is developed too far, we shall see in some of the English-speaking parts of Wales a vast majority tyrannized over by a few Welsh speaking people in Cardiganshire.... The whole of the civil service of Wales would be eventually provided from those small pockets of Welsh speaking, Welsh writing zealots and the vast majority of Welshmen would be denied participation in the government of their own country”. Neil Kinnock, and then Carwyn Jones who went to Scotland to support the No vote in their referendum, came from the opposite side of the political divide but united in their rejection of an independent Wales.

As someone who had viewed Brexit vote as a way to re-calibrate the politics in UK, I am deeply saddened with what we have got now, I never saw us coming out of Europe completely, and had thought that there would be a more balanced and fit for the times EU membership. That is how I feel about Wales - I do not see an independent Wales, but support a much more devolved and stronger Wales, and in

expressing this view I am only following what Saunders Lewis had said: "We do need a government of our own. Not independence. Not even an unconditional freedom. But exactly that degree of freedom which is necessary in order to make civilization secure in Wales."

In this regard, the response of Boris Johnson to the Covid Inquiry, as reported in the recent BBC News, does not make comfortable reading: "...Wales' first minister had been frustrated at the number of meetings he had with the Westminster government.

But Mr Johnson feared working closely with first ministers could make the UK look like a 'mini-EU of four nations.

That is not, in my view, how devolution is supposed to work, he said."

And the news item went on: "Speaking to the Covid inquiry on Monday, politics expert Professor Ailsa Henderson of Edinburgh University said there was a "fear of federalism, there is a fear of leaks", that the UK government perceived a "self-serving nature to the motives of the devolved administrations".

She said the minutes of the meeting of UK government ministers was "the most remarkable document I have read in a number of years". "

Whilst it is premature, in one sense, to judge the outcome of the Covid inquiry, most people have already made their minds up, and they know where the blame lies.

I recognise the arguments about value for money and efficiencies with shared functions for many public bodies like the Charity Commission or Cricket Board (yes, cricket is alive in Wales), and for Wales to duplicate everything will be expensive, but it requires 'equal' partnership, and which does not exist in relations between England and Wales policymakers.

May be the answer is a federal arrangement, with clarity on the balance between central and local? Currently, I feel that both parties are losers; some of the things that are happening in Wales would benefit other parts of the Union, and vice-versa.

Some time ago I was talking to my dear friend Dick in Sydney and he mentioned how much he enjoyed learning about the Well-being of Future Generations Act - he had been to a talk there by the Commissioner. Dick and I have known each other for many years, and we often talk, and which now and then turns to the state of the world, and we wonder if we have been good ancestors - are we leaving a better world than we inherited, how the future generations will judge us. Call it the nostalgia of old age, whilst recognising some of the advances of the last century that have helped humankind, we also feel upset at how things are currently and particularly the climate change challenge and the increasing inequality. On the eve of the introduction of 20 mph speed limits in Sep 2023, The BBC News published an article listing the 10 things such as the Well Being of Future Generations Act, free prescriptions for all, carrier bag charges or restricting meal deals, where the Welsh governments have taken the lead, and I felt very proud – just what is needed to ensure a future for humankind on this fragile planet.

Frankly if Wales did not exist, we will want to invent it! After all, as Jim Perrin says - it physically resembles heaven already, and which is only one part. Wales to me is not just a place but it is a way of living and values. During the pandemic there were stories of how some of the world's billionaires have been buying land in, and visas to, places like the New Zealand or Patagonia, creating their own refuges, just like in Ayn Rand's book 'Atlas Shrugged' describing the dystopian world, which is the reality of USA now. Except that the situation now is that there is no safe place - rich or poor, regardless of race, nationality whatever; it is one world and we sink or swim together. Corona virus was a reminder that these things are no protection, and so is climate change. Overall, what is important is good governance as shown by many countries that did far better than the 'advanced' UK and USA.

Jim Perrin writes in his book: 'West, A journey through the landscape of loss': "I thought of George Bernard Shaw's visit to Radnorshire", "One day.... As he stood gazing at the surrounding hills, so accessible and yet so solitary. With arms outstretched he suddenly exclaimed; "No man ought to be in the government of this land who does not spend three months every year in such a country as this." He then went on to muse about Tony Blair, since the book was at the time of Iraq War, and of course Blair seems almost like the Bambi that he was often portrayed as compared to the wolves now.

There is a lot at stake, and time is not on our side – heads in the sand and short-termism are not going to help, even though people of my vintage will be gone before the apocalypse happens, but that is no excuse, we have to act and do whatever we can. The younger people are already becoming aware of the lack of the leadership, and about the need to act humanely and responsibly. I was struck the other day when I went to look for the book by Manon Stefan Ross: 'The blue book of Nebo' about the survival of a mother and son after the apocalypse – with nature playing a big part in meeting their physical and mental health needs, and was told by the librarian in Ruthin Library that it was upstairs in the children/young people's section! When we were at Yr Ysgwrn recently, we were shown around Hedd Wynn's place by a wonderful young girl, who was brought up on the next farm, knew all about the land/animals, fluent in Welsh and English, had won awards at the Eisteddfod, had just come back from taking a group of children to Europe and was going off to Bangor university – and I was just bowled over; with youth like her Wales cannot fail-unless we fail them now. We need to find ways of growing more of them. One final quote from Jim Perrin (you might as well read his books than this essay!): "this is the only Snowdonia – the only Eryri- we have. We must care for it (by which I mean preserve its essential, timeless character as near unchanged as is possible for future generations) as best as we can; and care presupposes that knowledge and consideration born of love that I mentioned earlier" (and he was talking about the Welsh way of life). So, we need more people who love and care about Wales.

Well-being of Future Generations must not be allowed to become a document on the shelves with passing nods to it every now and then, with the 'real' world carrying on as before, but must become a way of life – we must learn to love it, breathe it, and work for it. I feel that Wales has finally turned the corner, it is beginning to assert itself, and the price paid by those people who fought so hard to protect the language

and save the country is paying off; we owe to them and the future generations to continue what was started. Some hard decisions have to be made, now, not later. Reconciling natural beauty, economy and climate change is a tough call – the ubiquitous sheep farming, the picture post card Wales, needs a fundamental rethink, just as stopping the loss of local and smaller communities for many reasons but especially housing and jobs. Our track record as humans of such transformation is not good; the writing has been on wall for some time, and the solutions known, as Thomas Firbank wrote in the conclusion of his book: ‘I bought a mountain’, in 1940s:

“But imagine this. Imagine British capital invested in British land, secure from moratoriums, wars and national bankruptcies. Imagine the farmer engaging men for their neglected work, for draining, plumbing, cultivating. And for every pound that the industry invests in agriculture nineteen shillings and elevenpence will flow back to factories as farmers renew their worn-out machinery, modernise their antiquated equipment, expand their cultivation.”

“Men are loath just now to return to the land. The life is hard, the wage small, and the instinct of husbandry is dead in them. But man was born of husbandry. In the bleak times ahead he may return again to his only sure help, the soil. He will readjust his values, and may taste in the end the ultimate joy of tending nature in her labour. “

Reconnecting with the land, *the Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi*, can and must be done. The economic challenge – no jobs, no houses - needs address urgently to stem the outflow of youth and talent, and that will require imaginative solutions, and learning from history. As Kate Roberts writes in her autobiography; about the struggles of men trying to make a living “.....beginning to work the quarry on common land, the lord of the manor pitching in with claim that the common land was part of his land, and the workers profiting from it. That was one struggle. The other struggle was about the building of one-night houses on common land. Men then building better houses, and working the land, and within a few years the Crown laying claim to their small holdings. Then the quarries were worked by private companies....”

It is not just quarries, there are many natural resources in Wales, which are already being ‘exploited’ – the windfarms are mushrooming, both on- and off- shore, and ‘water is the new oil’ globally for example; these should be used to protect and advance the cause of Wales. I found Cefyn’s work on the Welsh communities in USA, Argentina and now India a reminder of the important part Wales has played on the world stage, and this to me is something that we should celebrate and promote. I lived in Republic of Ireland for a few years and used to see hordes of American tourists coming over to visit their roots, and so why not make it easy and enjoyable for all those with Welsh connections overseas to visit their parent country; international tourism, as far as I can see, is not well developed. And it is not just tourism, there is scope for bilateral programmes in healthcare and education – the two biggest challenges facing all countries, and on nature- Wyn, with his Bangor University connections, has already got students working on projects with our AONB, for example. There are all sorts of options – we need to apply ourselves.

We must be bold and imaginative; how about following the spirit of 'Ty Unnos' to let people have small holdings and build their dwellings in designated areas? I found this in the obituary in the Guardian the other day "In the 1950s and 60s John Turner, who has died aged 96, addressed the housing challenges faced by members of rural communities in Peru when they migrated to urban areas in search of a better life. Official planning and design approaches were neither appropriate nor affordable to such people, and Turner was immensely impressed by their resourcefulness in creating their own housing developments and even complete neighbourhoods", and was interested to learn that this was also taken up elsewhere in the world. And New York has started taking tough measures to stop the growth of AirBnB and bring homes back for residents. I believe that Wales should be exploring such options, raising council taxes for second homes is only one part of the jigsaw – and even that is counter-productive in some instances - and be more creative in its pursuit of Well Being of Future Generations plans. I do not buy the work-shy and lazy people argument put out by the media and some politicians, such people are a minority, most people want to live and work locally, and what they need is a bit of help. Eileen Webb in her book: 'This valley was ours' tells the story of Nant Gwrtheryn which was abandoned in the aftermath of WW2 and then regenerated, and is a thriving place now.

The people already have the core strength due to the strong Welsh values, because as put by Kate Roberts, the writer, when asked what she had inherited from her parents and her community: "....I can't say whether I have inherited my parents' traits of character: their power to carry on in spite of everything, their outcry against every injustice, their compassion for people who were down and out, their readiness to help a neighbour, their ability to talk entertainingly (on the hearth but not outside), their sense of humour, their honesty..... One thing I am certain I have inherited from my mother is speaking plainly, or as she would say, 'speaking the plain truth' and "We never saw riches, but we had riches that no one can take away from us, the riches of a language and a culture." And this was distilled into them at an early age, through the Sunday schools – the chapels were not for religion only, "we had every kind of competition, sight reading a piece without punctuation, reading poor-handwriting (being a doctor that brought a smile), singing, recitation, giving directions, constructing sentences and answering questions on general knowledge." Folk would pay good money these days for their children to have such education!

And that is what we should be celebrating and standing up for – those very traits, the land, the riches of the culture and the language. I cannot understand why anyone would want to deny this right of a people to speak their language. This issue struck me forcefully when I was reading the history of the (in) famous Denbigh Mental Hospital, which came about because of the bad treatment of *Welsh paupers in workhouses and private madhouses* (not my words) since they only spoke Welsh. ".....it is proverbial on our English Asylums that the Welshman is the most turbulent patient wherever he happens to become an inmate" stated Dr Samuel Hitch, Medical Superintendent to Gloucester Lunatic Asylum in a letter to The Times in 1841. "Even when the Denbigh Hospital was finally set up, it took eight years to get a Welsh

speaking Pastor to cater to the religious needs of the Welsh speakers,” says Clwyd Wynne, the local historian.

More recently, I was rather concerned with some of the media coverage about the National Eisteddfod this year, with increasing pressure to accommodate English language performers and visitors, and was completely lost as to why would anyone want to make it bilingual. Bilingual Wales yes, but bilingual Eisteddfod, NO. I am aware that some of the major Eisteddfods in the past used to be open to both Welsh and English entries – The Hindu Bard, Dorothy Bonerjee – the first female and born in India, though not a Hindu - won the Chair for her entry in English in The Aberystwyth College Eisteddfod in 1914. I also recognise that the majority of Welsh nationals do not speak Welsh and they have as much right to call themselves Welsh, and perhaps there should be another Welsh festival like the current Eisteddfods to celebrate the ‘joint – across the language barrier’ - Welshness? I remember my first visit to the one in Llanrwst when I had no Welsh at all, yet had a wonderful time walking around and just absorbing the atmosphere; seeing the Gorsedd with Karen Owen being part of it and Cefyn Burgess being honoured for his work made me really happy.

We should not allow language: Welsh or English or religion: chapel vs church divide us. A few years ago, I read with dismay the debate about Diwali or Christmas in the medical journals – as if you must choose one or the other, why, why not both- let each celebrate their own culture and let each rejoice in the other’s joy. It all reminded me of what I feel about religions:

Religion in India

*Never talk about
Religion at parties
Most divisive
Sure way to
Lose friends
Make enemies
Stick to football
Weather, travel*

*Such a shame
More I learn
About ‘others’
More I find same
Did the ‘founders’
Want to create religion
What would they say
About their legacy*

*Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai
At core the same
Leaving me wondering
Who I am
Trappings of all*

*Revile me
Teachings of all
Revive me*

*But, better not talk
In 'secular' India
Lines drawn clearly
Growing intolerance
Even who were
Moderates and liberal
At boiling point
'God' save us all*

and that is why we hold a multi-faith celebration of Diwali in Ruthin, where different religions come together to celebrate the spirit of Diwali: victory of light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance.

I wish for a truly multi-cultural and diverse Wales, where no one is discriminated against for being who they are, where everyone is treated fairly, and where we are all bound by the truly Welsh values.

May be, just as there is an element of anti-English (not just the language) in Wales, there may be an element of being pro-Indian as far as I am concerned – both, India and Wales had a common oppressor, so that is why people are nice to me! After all, the British did the same to us in India as the English did in Wales. As children we were all taught the famous 'If' poem by Rudyard Kipling in India- also seen as the nation's top poem in one of the bestselling 100 poems in one of the UK anthologies – but his views have been widely criticised for their racist and imperialist sentiments. English Heritage points in particular to works such as *The White Man's Burden* "with its offensive description of 'new-caught, sullen peoples, half devil and half child'" which "sought to portray imperialism as a mission of civilisation." It is interesting that even earlier there was recognition of this when George Orwell found Kipling's attitude to instances of colonial brutality "morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting."

And then there was the equivalent of the Welsh Blue Book saga in India with the Macaulay report: As Anirban Mitra wrote in *The Wire* in 2017: "Macaulay was undoubtedly a colonial apologist and racist who passionately believed there was no 'culture' beyond Europe. This is evident even from his 'minutes of 2nd Feb, 1835' where he said, "...a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia..." and

"... I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit

language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England...”

Furthermore, it was from his erroneous, yet arrogant assessment of Indian civilisation that Macaulay advised, “...We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate... Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created... we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects...”

So, learning about ‘Welsh Not’, whilst shocking in one sense, was not surprising. And the struggle of the Welsh nation to try and retain its language including as depicted in the film ‘Y Swn’ reinforces my sympathy and support, and I find myself agreeing with Sion Jobbins in ‘The Phenomenon of Welshness’: “The moral purpose of the Welsh state is to promote the Welsh language and Welsh culture through the medium of Welsh *and English* (my italics). That is its whole point. The morality of our state is to overturn centuries of discrimination against the indigenous language, everything else can be done by another state.”

“If the British state is willing to send men to war to promote and defend the English language, then the Welsh state should be ready to do everything in its power to create a truly bilingual, literate Welsh nation. If it won’t do that, then the vehicle for change that is the Welsh state, and the very concept of Wales, has lost its moral purpose. If that’s the case, then there is no point to Wales.” He was referring to Britain fighting in Falkland to protect its territory.

I am not, and I do not think anyone else is, suggesting exclusivity for the Welsh language - it is a bilingual country and both, Welsh and English, should be used and supported. “The Wikipedia has this to say: In the modern period, languages have typically become extinct as a result of the process of cultural assimilation leading to language shift, and the gradual abandonment of a native language in favour of a foreign *lingua franca*, largely those of European countries. As of the 2000s, a total of roughly 7,000 natively spoken languages existed worldwide. Most of these are minor languages in danger of extinction; one estimate published in 2004 expected that some 90% of the currently spoken languages will have become extinct by 2050. “

And guess what? We will all be the poorer for the loss of this diversity. The ‘McDonaldisation’ of the world, driven by the corporates, and suppression in countries by dictators of minorities, must be resisted. The instant rapport when we discover the shared language is so joyful. I met the Indian contingent at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod in the summer, and for most of them it was their first time in Wales, and indeed overseas, and the ‘culture shock’ was profound; and as soon as I greeted them in Punjabi they all gathered around and started smiling and talking at once, very relaxing for them. I felt bad as I could not do anything for them, and resolved to look into supporting them and may be bringing them to Ruthin in the future, if the organisers would allow that; I feel that they can be great Ambassadors for us when they go back, and we can do with some ‘Bhangra’ (the

Punjabi dance) here! We were in Rome some time back and like other tourists made a beeline for the regular sights; bit lost around the Colosseum I went to speak to one of the ticket -sellers/agents wandering there looking for business – it was 10 minutes later I parted company with him with a hug (he was from Pakistan) and during which time we talked in the mix of Punjabi/Urdu of our heritage, to the amusement of Helen. She was not offended at being ignored as my new found friend and I chatted away; she understood and rejoiced that even in the busy Colosseum I had found a kindred soul. By the way, he also told me how to get better deals to save money, places to see, and things to avoid!

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.” – said Nelson Mandela. (For him, also read her....Helen would add)

laith da iawn

*Wyt ti'n siarad Cymraeg?
Ardderchog, dweud nhw
Pan dw i'n deud rhwybeth
Ar cyfarfod eu wedi nhw
A wedyn gaethon nhw wedi bod cyffroi
a dechrau siarad yn gyflym
Arafwch, rhaid I mi deud wrthun nhw
os gwelwch yn dda a defnydd geirau byr
Yn dwy neu tri brawddegau ar y tro
Dw I ddim yn dda eto
Felly rhwy o amser rhoi i mi*

How can one not like a language which has words like Dysgu, which means both, learn and teach - two sides of the same coin! And as Gwyneth told me Hunaniaith is the Welsh word for identity (hunan=self, iaith=language). I enjoyed reading the 'Welsh and I' book by Stephen Rule, who credits the language for changing his life, and there are many more books including fantastic resources on the internet. I find the language quite musical and although the mutations can be challenging for a learner, I can see how they came about and how they enrich the language. The Welsh equivalent of raining cats and dogs phrase - 'bwrw hen wragedd â ffyn (raining old ladies and sticks) – just makes me smile. Coming back on the train from London and hearing the announcements in Welsh lifts me up, as does hearing the patter, and seeing the chaos, on arrival at the Mumbai airport in India. There is something magical when people are talking in their own language.

A Guardian article after the death of Milan Kundera lends further support to the importance of language for a culture:

“The identity of a people and of a civilisation is reflected and concentrated in what has been created by the mind – in what is known as ‘culture’,” Kundera wrote in *A Kidnapped West*, an essay first published in 1983 in the influential French journal *Le Débat*. It was the development of an argument that Kundera had nurtured for many years.

Culture, he had suggested almost two decades earlier, in an address to the Czech Writers' Congress in 1967, was vital "to justify and preserve our national identity". Only through protecting "language and identity" could small nations sustain their "values."

It may be because I have other languages – I can read/write and speak Hindi and English, and speak Urdu and Punjabi, with some modicum of Welsh now – that I am more sympathetic, and because I am a migrant and son of refugees, and overall believe that polyglots and immigrants bring perspectives not seen by monoglots and natives, and such diversity is enriching.

Vikram Seth in his book: 'From Heaven Lake' says: "To learn about another culture is to enrich one's life, to understand one's own country better, to feel more at home in the world, and indirectly to add to that reservoir of individual goodwill that may, generations from now, temper the cynical use of national power." He was talking about relationships between India and China but it applies equally everywhere.

Natives or migrants, we all want a home, but home is both, a place where you can go and be safe, and a place that you make safe - it is a reciprocal relationship between the person and place; each shapes the other. My Wales is not just a nation or geographical entity. In any case my knowledge of Wales is very limited – I do not know much about the areas beyond North and parts of Mid and West Wales, and my circles of friends and colleagues is small - but whilst I would like to learn more, I am also content that I have got the 'essence' of Welshness and which is a set of values and behaviours – humanist in nature, and it is a welcoming place. This is what is encompassed in its name: Cymru: a compatriot/fellow countryman, whereas Wales name was given to it and implies a foreigner!

Be ydy'r ddim yn hoffi

*Gwyrdd bryniau, awyr iach
Cefn gwlad a glan y mor
Mwy dafaid na phobl
A fy hoff, bara brith
Gwneud gan Cefyn
Gyda the gryf
A gwrando ar y canueon
Yma o hyd, diolch y dduw
Cymru am byth*

Tom Roberts in the foreword to Eileen Webb's book about Nant Gwrtheryn writes: "...to my wife, Phyllis, who had spent two years of her childhood there, it was a very special place, Although at first I was indifferent to her constant references to it, I gradually came to realise that underlying those references was not only an inordinate love for the little valley but a deep longing to return there, It seemed that she could not get the place out of her mind which, in view of her short residency, appeared to me to be somewhat illogical. "

It is hard to explain this longing – the Hiraeth - where it comes from and why and how it affects people; but Pamela Petro (the writer of ‘The Long Field’ book) sums it up well: “Hiraeth is a mark of our humanity. It is a supple and flexible instrument for measuring the depth of one’s dreams, one’s commitment to community, the source of one’s empathy and love. Knowing what we yearn for, understanding in what place or with whom or under which conditions our souls feel at home, especially when that home is inaccessible, is the truest hallmark of who we are.” And she had come from America, without knowing much about Wales but felt she belonged here – she had Hiraeth.

And like Phyllis above, once it gets hold of you, you cannot shake it off; this is what made Mari Morgan take the Welsh music into the American soul as Menna Elfyn says in the introduction to Morgan’s book: ‘Braids of song’: “Through walking the thin line between belonging and that of hiraeth for her native country, Mari Morgan’s writing is heightened between jubilation and soulfulness. She manages to recapture the voices of Welsh musical icons of the past, revisiting their life stories and that of her own so that Wales becomes an extension of her adopted country full of sonic beauty, wisdom, energy, and hope. “

This hiraeth, the best of the Welsh values, culture, and behaviours, is what makes the world go round, makes for fulfilling lives, and what we need more of.

In 1979, as a newly qualified doctor in India, and one who was going to come to the UK for further training, I had to take up some work to build my credentials and earn some money, and ended up working with the World Health Organisation on their Malaria programme and got posted to, guess where..... Shillong, and then spent a few months in the surrounding districts and visited some of the other states in North-East India (Mizoram was closed to any visitors then). To arrive in Ruthin and discover the long standing and rich links between India and Wales suggests that maybe it was all part of a ‘Divine’ plan - I was meant to be in Wales. The hiraeth, perhaps from the spirits of the Welsh folk in Khasi Hills, had got into me? It was predestined and all my previous life was leading up to coming to Wales. In the end, however, it took the advert that brought me to that flat in Ruthin that did it. That is all one needs- the one chance, and now I belong here.

Belonging

*Just be
No longing*

At her 90th birthday party in 2016, Morris said that although her travels had taken her to many exotic locations, her corner of Wales had been her “chief delight,” recalls Paul Clements, author of ‘Jan Morris: Around the World in Eighty Years’, a collection of tributes by noted authors. “What I have done for Wales,” Morris said at her party, “is infinitesimal compared to what Wales has done for me.”

When we give, we get in return – just like dysgu, and it all helps: gwnewch y pethau bychain. This essay then is my small thing. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

Explanations, Acknowledgements, and Declarations

I did not set out to write a history of Wales nor did I feel able to look at all aspects of the Welsh nation. This is simply the story of how Wales supported me in my time of need, and why I feel protective towards it. I can be accused of over-simplifying things, of not 'understanding the reality,' and being selective. I accept all these criticisms; after all the literature on the notions of nation, culture, statehood, belonging etc itself is vast, and I have not even scratched the surface. In my defence I can point out that I have read around the subject and indeed found the book: 'The battle of belonging' by Shashi Tharoor on these matters a good (and easier) read. Similarly, I can recommend the book: 'What we owe the future' by William MacAskill which reinforces why the Well Being of Future Generations Act is so important. Yes, more work is needed to generate wider consensus and acceptance - the recent introduction of 20 mph speed limit is an example which has divided opinion - and where political effort, and time, will help to 'hard-wire' the aspirations of the Act into policy making and the collective psyche. However, Wales has made a start, and hence is to be commended. Overall, my purpose has been to make sense of both: my situation - psychologically, and my situation - geographically, and which are inter-related, and give thanks since these have come together to help me, and in turn to help build a better future for others.

I want to record my thanks to my friends who have appeared in this essay – you have been very kind to me, trusting me with your stories and I hope I have done justice. In case I have not, I apologise. Of course, there have been many others who also helped but have not been named in the essay, and I owe them too. I am also thankful to a number of organisations with whom I am associated in various capacities- they are named in the essay; in particular I want to mention my appointment as a member of the Advisory Board of More than Just Words- Mwy na Geiriau – to promote the uptake of Welsh language in health and social care settings, I feel honoured to have been asked to join the Board. Overall, the views expressed in the essay are my responsibility, and where I have got things wrong it is not intentional and I ask for forgiveness.

The picture on the cover page is of a painting by Helen – and a representation of Denbigh Moors, and the back cover is by Cefyn of a scene in the hills in north-east India.

Contact: madhokrajan@gmail.com

www.ruthinindiaculturalexchange.com

Epilogue

In late November 2023, I finally made it to the North-East India, after a gap of 44 years. The visit was to further develop the Music Exchange programme, which was started in memory of the Late Mair Jones (the renowned harpist, professionally known as Mair Roberts), and explore further options for building on the strong and long historical links between that part of the world and India.

The Shillong I had visited in 1979 no longer exists in the sense that the population has grown and so has the city, and is now like most of the cities in India congested and over-built. On the other hand, it is also the same, and some of this may be because Shillong is now part of Meghalaya state, which was created by bringing together the three hills tribes of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills to preserve their cultures, and this culture of friendship, generosity, and music and laughter that I saw then, still continues.

I was in the company of Cefyn and Martin, and Nia- the harpist from Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias who has been the music link/expert for the programme (with grants from Wales Arts International). I paid homage to Rev Thomas Jones, the first missionary, at his chapel in Cherapunji and visited the Gordon Roberts and Norman Tunnel Hospitals in Shillong and Jowai. Amongst many things what struck me was the fondness for the Welsh people after nearly two centuries; some of the villagers we met on the visit to the Double-Decker Living Bridge did not know Wales, but when we mentioned Thomas Jones their eyes lit up and they wanted to shake our hands and take pictures with us. By the way, it is a long way down, and up (3500 steps), to the Bridge, and some of the people seeing my white hair expressed surprise that I was doing it! They did not know how Wales with its hills and mountains had trained me well. I am afraid I deprived the stretcher bearers- along the route these are positioned to carry back people who struggle – of business. I felt thankful for the Welsh missionaries and the work done since.

The visit also made me wonder about building on their legacy, and extending the current programme to health sector, to begin with. I have a long standing interest in fostering Indo: UK health collaborations (<https://ramareflections.com/pdfs/Lage-Raho-Munna-Bhai.pdf>) and where there is much to be gained, mutually. We may be in 'different boats' but we are in the 'same storm' with the same global influences on health, and we need to join forces and learn and teach each other (Dysgu!). This fact really struck me when I had to give a public lecture on the NHS at the Indian Institute of Public Health, Shillong –it was not easy to extol the virtues of the NHS given the daily news of failures and especially the coverage of the Covid Inquiry. I hope that the relevant organisations in Wales, and particularly my local Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board, will take an interest, and form sustainable partnerships. As one of my doctor colleagues in the UK said to me: “we need India more than they need the NHS, and which is a broken health system anyway”. Certainly, the work being done in infectious diseases and on One Health: Human, Animal and Plant together there are worth further study, and as the plans to develop the new National Park in north-east

Wales proceed we should explore collaboration on eco-tourism and nature and health.

I also hope that this time round we will do better as we develop future programmes and rectify some of the mistakes made by colonialism; a senior Khasi person I spoke to, thanked Thomas Jones for giving them their alphabet and hence their written language, but also wondered how much was then lost in translation, and how the missionaries had influenced, knowingly and unknowingly, the way their society then developed, and questioned the uncritical acceptance of beneficial effects of the work of missions. He referred me to Andrew May's book: 'Welsh Missionaries and British Imperialism: The Empire of Clouds in North-East India' which provides an interesting and detailed assessment of the role of missionaries and the empire; seemingly not all that happened was right. We can only speculate on these matters now, but unable to rectify the past excesses can perhaps atone by helping to create a better future.

The world really is one now: One earth, One family, One future – Vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam~ as the posters all along the airport roads in India, as part of G20 summit there, read; and the Welsh India links are not just mutually, but globally, beneficial in this regard. The rich bio-diversity, the cultures and languages of north-east India offer hope for a world rushing towards apocalypse, and Wales can, and should, join forces with them. The visit made me realise that what I had speculated when I was writing the essay seemed to me to be correct - the 'Hiraeth' that affected me in Shillong and brought me to Wales indeed had a purpose, and it was to bring the two peoples, and the countries, close together, I had gone full circle.

A reader comments

“I learnt so much from the generous stories offered by your friends alongside your own insights and interpretations. I am very thankful for the opportunity to have read your essay; many lightbulbs went off, dots were connected from distant teachings at school or conversations overheard. Whilst I can remember very little Welsh history from my schooling (up until 2003), lots of what was contained in here I could relate to or have heard others say whilst reflecting on Wales.

My friend in Boston, USA, xxxx, was born an Englishman but always identified as a Welshman. Always talks about Hiraeth after a couple of pints. We bonded over our connections to Wales in Harvard Square (Boston) over a decade ago and have been good friends since; whenever a family challenge brings him back to Wales, we reconnect like it was yesterday, and I think he gains so much / a recharge if you like from coming back. Also, your essay got me thinking about my close colleague at xxxx, who holds a US passport, but proudly speaks of being Honorary Welsh and the love of the land and its people.

I had not appreciated the similarities between Welsh history and the oppression experienced by people in other countries. I had also never had a lens to appreciate the different materials of Chapels as I have driven the beautiful A470 between South and North and its offshoots. “

Andrew Carson-Stevens
Professor of Patient Safety
Cardiff University

NOTE: Andrew is much younger than me, is a native South Walian, and does not speak the language; all the reasons I wanted him to review the essay!

Late Fragment

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on this earth

Raymond Carver



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