

Poppies and Daffodils: Remembrance and Hope

by Eirlys M. Barker for
Heddwch Nain/ Mam-gu US

In March 2024, Heddwch Nain/ Mam-gu US was involved in a presentation at the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Missouri. The event opened with singing by the North American Welsh Choir and our own Ann Griffith laid a wreath of daffodils on the stage. What a great way to commemorate the Welsh Women's Peace Appeal that, while it honored the fallen of the First World War, actively sought a way to create a "warless world."

This museum was a perfect place for such a presentation. When the Liberty Memorial, the origin of the current museum, opened in November 11, 1926, President Calvin Coolidge, declared "it has not been raised to commemorate war and victory, but rather the results of war and victory which are embodied in peace and liberty." People on both sides of the Atlantic had much to mourn and remember, while planning and yearning for that elusive "warless world."

In the United States, May 25th is National Poppy Day, honoring veterans and service members. In Britain, poppies are mostly associated with Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, a day of remembrance and hope. One strange result the



Ann Griffith Of Heddwch Nain/ Mam-gu United States, at the World War I Museum, Kansas City, March 2024.

battering of the ground on the Western Front took during the war was that it brought dormant red corn poppy seeds to the surface. They bloomed, the only signs of life between the graves. Canadian surgeon John McCrae's 1915 poem, "In Flanders Fields," noted how "In Flanders fields the poppies blow, between the crosses, row on row." The recent PBS Belgian series, "In Flanders Fields" also used the red poppies so effectively in its credits, blending images of poppies with blood. About 40,000 Welshmen died there.

Many women in Wales had toiled in their towns and villages to build memorials to the dead and wounded. There are

only three confirmed "Thankful Villages" in Wales, that is places where all their soldiers returned safely. Some villages lost all the young men who had enlisted to fight together in "Pals battalions." Memorials ranged from plaques in the local town hall or place of worship to Memorial Halls and new Cottage Hospitals, such as at Tywyn in Gwynedd. Tiny places like Pencader in Carmarthenshire located its small but poignant memorial at the center of the village to honor its eight men killed during the war and the nine who died later as a result of their service.

Some memorials are stunning as at Aberystwyth, where it is



Courtesy the Welsh Center for International Affairs

North American Welsh Choir sings for Peace in Kansas City, song by song



Côr Cymry Gogledd America - North American Welsh Choir in concert at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral, Kansas City, MO, March 9, 2024. Photo: Beth Landmesser

by Jessamine Guislain

When I saw a notice for a concert in Kansas City, MO by a Welsh choir, I knew I had to attend. The choral director for whom I had worked as accompanist was a huge fan of Welsh choirs and had even traveled to Wales to sing with a choir there.

I expected a group from Wales but was surprised to find they were from across North America. The North American Welsh Choir comprised of 42 singers from 17 states and one Canadian province.

The minute they entered the glorious nave of Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral, I knew I was in for a grand treat! They had purpose! The director, Dr. Mari Morgan, was encouraging the audience to clap louder for them, and we did.

The results were outstanding! The choristers sang beautifully together with joy and love. It was obvious.

The concert title, "Peace, song by song", was evident in each song. Dr. Morgan directed each piece with this in mind. It was a wonderful experience for us and the rest of the audience.

"Hawlio Heddwch, cân wrth gân" was the Welsh title for the concert, sponsored by the St. David's Welsh Society of

Kansas City. As we learned, the concert was the first in a weekend of activities to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Welsh Women's Peace Appeal from the women of Wales to the women the United States.

The selection of songs and poems flowed effortlessly. There was a wide selection of songs, some being sung for the first time in the United States. Particularly notable was the anthem, "Ceisiwch, ac fe gewch - Seek, and you will find" by the composer, Meirion Wynn Jones with words by Peter M Thomas commissioned for the concert at the Cathedral.

Likewise, several poems were presented for the first time including "Rhyw swñ anghyfarwydd (an unfamiliar sound) by Elinor Wyn Reynolds, "Chwiorydd Hedd - Sisters of Peace" by Menna Elfyn, translated by Emma Baines, and "Y Genedl Hon" (This Nation) by Beti-Wyn James. All the poems were read by women from the choir, as were the English translation introductions to the songs.

The soloists were superb. Each sang with expression and excellent intonation. I was happy to hear "At the River" by the great American composer Aaron Copland. As an

accompanist, I have played that piece many times and was very moved by the artistry and heartfelt singing of Allison La Pointe. It affected me to the shedding of tears. The gifted pianist Kim Lloyd Jones was a perfect musical partner, as she was in the entire program. How fortunate for the choir that she made the trip to play for them and collaborate with Dr. Morgan. How fortunate for all of us that Mari Morgan formed this choir so many years ago and we were able to hear them in the Heart of America.

The next day, March 10, the choir sang at the National World War One Museum and Memorial, located in Kansas City. Before church, I saw the video post on Facebook put out by the World War One Museum showing the North American Welsh Choir singing "What does the Lord require of you?" on the glass bridge over the poppy field. That was beautiful!

Thank you so much for all you do for choral music, especially Welsh music. Thank you for coming to Kansas City. Peace to all of you.

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Aberystwyth War Memorial. Courtesy Steve Pugh

located on the castle grounds jutting out into Cardigan Bay. Its memorial is especially moving "at the going down of the sun," words from the 1914 poem "For the Fallen" by R. Laurence Binyon. Aberystwyth lost 111 men in this conflict and its imposing and controversial monument was created by the Italian sculptor, Mario Rutelli. It was unveiled in September 1923, just as the women of Wales were collecting the signatures for the peace petition, which was also called a "memorial." Rutelli's Winged Victory tops the memorial. A much-discussed and debated female nude represents Humanity arising from the horrors of war and the inscription "dros ryddid" over the names of the dead cites the Welsh national anthem: these men lost their lives for freedom.

In the 1920s, the Welsh League of Nations Union (WLNU) declared May 18, Daffodil Day and Goodwill Day. It is still the day that the children of Wales, through Urdd Gobaith Cymru (the Welsh League of Youth) broadcast their annual message of peace and goodwill to the children of the world. This year, it will celebrate the Welsh Women's Peace appeal of 1923-24, "highlighting the need to advocate for peace a hundred years on." <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/peace-and-goodwill/>

Both this message, delivered since 1922, and the women's venture were first envisioned by

the Reverend Gwilym Davies, honorary secretary of the WLNU. The peace petition's short-term goal was to encourage American women to pressure their Senators into ratifying the Treaty of Versailles and to embrace the League of Nations as a first step towards universal peace. The Welsh delegates were greeted on arrival that New York snowy day by women and cars covered in daffodils. According to a WLNU pamphlet: the "daffodil begins to grow in hard ground in the grip of winter. . . . It is the open and visible symbol of the triumph of hope over experience. And what else after all these failures in establishing peace on earth is the Covenant of the League of Nations?"

Today as we celebrate the Welsh Women's Peace Mission, the daffodil offers us hope for the future. Their mission may have failed, but their story, their spirit and determination to work for international peace is inspiring to us today and to future generations.

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