

Cymdeithas Madog Brings Annual Welsh Course to Zoom

by Sarah J. Stevenson

History has demonstrated that *yr hen iaith* can thrive in a variety of environments, from the wilds of Patagonia to the not-so-wild university classroom. Now that many of us have moved large portions of our lives online, Welsh language learning has followed suit, once again proving its resilience. Local Welsh groups as well as larger organizations such as LearnWelsh.cymru offer far-flung learners a wide range of options, from Zoom lessons to online videos to directories of available courses. This past summer, Cymdeithas Madog, the Welsh Studies Institute in North America, Inc., joined the fray with our first-ever Cwrs Rhith, or Virtual Welsh Course.

I first studied Welsh as a college undergraduate at UC Berkeley, but it was Cymdeithas Madog's annual weeklong Cwrs Cymraeg that brought me back to learning Welsh after I had nearly given up on finding an opportunity to practice with other humans. It also introduced me to a welcoming community of friends and fellow language enthusiasts. It has now been twenty-one years since my first Cwrs Cymraeg in 1999, and I still participate as often as I can.

Like many others this year, though, I had to reconcile

myself to the idea that the in-person Cwrs would not be happening. I would not be linking arms with longtime friends or new acquaintances at the Twmpath Dawns. I would not be able to practice my Welsh with a friendly tutor over a pint at the pub after hours, or indulge my *hiraeth* with beautiful Welsh music sung by the Cwrs Choir. In the COVID era, all of those wonderful community-building events have become unquestionable no-nos!

Having recently rejoined the Board of Directors of Cymdeithas Madog, however, I was in a unique position to help figure out how to address this problem. Our current group of eight volunteer board members has been eager to help the organization move farther into the digital age, at a time when we all crave connection more than ever. We agreed that this year, Zoom was the way to go for Cwrs Cymraeg.

Since this was our first time attempting a virtual activity of any kind, we settled on a long weekend—July 24 to 26—rather than a full week. Instead of six levels of instruction, our stripped-down online Cwrs included three levels: Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced, with two sessions at each level. Each of the six informal sessions was led by an

experienced Cwrs Cymraeg tutor: two who “Zoomed in” directly from Wales, two Welsh ex-pats currently living in Canada, and two North American instructors. There was also a final wrap-up plenary session for the full group, announcing our plans to hold (we hope) an in-person course again in July of 2021 in Western New England.

The virtual course was a greater success than we ever anticipated! We had over 80 individual participants in total across the three levels, and a relative minimum of technical difficulties, which was a miracle in itself. What's more, we quickly concluded that cyberspace is ideal for one of the learning experiences our students most crave: conversation. Here in North America, the opportunity to speak Welsh with others, and hear others speaking Welsh, is rare in person—but with the help of some online tools and willing facilitators, we can reach new audiences who might not be able to attend our traveling in-person course.

We've learned a lot from this



2018 Cwrs at Hamline College, St. Paul, Minn. Tutors: John Otley, Wayne Harbert, Helen Jones, Christine McSorley, and Ceri Phillips.

initial foray into virtual language teaching. First and foremost, we now know that there is a great desire for both formal and informal Welsh lessons. In order to meet that need, we have decided to plan another virtual mini-course for January 22-24, just in time for Dydd Santes Dwynwen. In response to feedback, the groups will be smaller, and we will have more offerings

at the beginning level. Also, we are starting up a monthly “Siop Siarad”—informal conversation groups for learners who would like to practice speaking. Please visit our organization's website, and our new, under-construction resource hub, SpeakWelsh.org, for more information—and consider joining our mailing list for the latest news.

Côr Cymry Gogledd America yn Dysgu Cymraeg

By Dan Rowbotham

Although 2020 has been a year unlike no other – *Côr Cymry Gogledd America* (North American Welsh Choir) has found these times to be filled with opportunity!

Since March 28, we have gathered together *virtually* every week to sing and to hold our community tight together – and have great fun in the process.

And since early September, we have been learning Welsh!

Every week, over thirty choristers from across the United States meet in four separate Welsh language classes, to focus on conversation, pronunciation, and basic Welsh grammar - sprinkled with insights into Welsh culture. All are doing a fantastic job in class and with their homework!

The three *Côr Cymry* tutors – all native Welsh speakers – are themselves spread across three countries. Our conductor, Dr. Mari Morgan is in the eastern USA; Hefina Philips is in Toronto, Canada; and me in Llangetho in west Wales.

All this adds an interesting twist to how we all greet each other during class – is it ‘*Bore da*’, ‘*Prynhawn da*’ or ‘*Noswaith dda*’? With all the time zones represented, it can be all at the same time! And then there's the added interest of ‘*Ble wyt ti'n byw?*’ We're from all over!

Côr Cymry classes follow the curriculum set out by The



National Centre for Learning Welsh - *Y Ganolfan Dysgu Cymraeg Genedlaethol*. We are very grateful for all the assistance and ongoing support that we receive from the organization.

Later in October, *Côr Cymry* will welcome Helen Prosser, Director of Teaching and Learning at the National Centre for Learning Welsh, to be our special guest. Helen will present a special ‘masterclass’ session for all the classes, and kick-off our series of *Sadwrn Siarad*

(Conversation Saturday) with an opportunity to come together and speak in Welsh—*Siarad yn Gymraeg!*

If you would like to learn Welsh or be part of our *Côr Cymry* community, don't delay, the welcome mat is out. *Croeso!* Visit us at or on Facebook @ *Côr Cymry Gogledd America*-North American Welsh Choir, or contact us by email at corecymry20@gmail.com.

“Billy Williams” —author of the “Smile, You’re Welsh” column— has died



Bill Williams and his wife, Mary Jane, as they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary

Dad wrote several future columns, and so you'll enjoy his humor for many more months.

Journalist and author, William G. “Bill” Williams of Mechanicsburg, Pa., died on Sept. 2, 2020, after a long battle with Pulmonary Fibrosis.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Mary Jane (nee Sayers); his three children: David (Heather) Williams of

Mechanicsburg, Jonathan Williams of Carlisle; and Johanna Jones (Scott Cook) of Camp Hill; five grandchildren: Katherine and Hannah Jones of Camp Hill, Evan Williams of Mechanicsburg, Elizabeth Agar and Joy Garman of Boiling Springs; and five great-grandchildren: Ian, Kendall, Ella, and Liv Garman and William Agar; his sister Barbara Roberts of

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**Diolchgarwch Hapus~ Happy Thanksgiving
Nadolig Llawen~Merry Christmas**