

# What's in a Name?

Joan Conway

In Wales surnames can sometimes present a problem. How does one distinguish one Jones or Williams from another Jones or Williams? Initials are useful with the result that O R Jones or T J Williams might be referred to as 'O R' or 'T J' and everyone knows who they are. Sometimes an additional explanatory phrase may be routinely added to a name, e.g. 'Williams the Milk' or 'James y Bara'. 'Conways' however are much thinner on the ground so, apart from being associated with the famous Castle and seaside town, I have not had any major problems with my name until ..... one day in February 1985.

In that year I was coming to the end of my four-year stint as Chair of Wales Regional Training Committee and we were planning a major training day for the Region. It was decided to take 'Publicity' as our theme for the day. There was a general feeling amongst many members that PPA did not sell itself enough. Also, National Playgroup day was fast approaching so publicity would be important. We decided to call our day 'Shouting from the Rooftops' and the day was to take the form of a mammoth multi-workshop – a hands-on session on all aspects of publicity and public relations. The aim of the day was to help our members to learn how to get their message across using all forms of media. We booked the large hall in the Gateway Centre, Shrewsbury and we planned what workshops to organise. Several of our Committee were willing to lead individual workshops and we found a local radio enthusiast who agreed to come in to pass on tips about using radio. Knowing how to submit material for the press – local or national – was seen as an important area to cover so I looked round for someone who might lead this section for us. I hit upon the idea of approaching the 'Shropshire Star' newspaper to see

if a member of their staff might help us out. The offices of the ‘Shropshire Star’ happened to be just across the road from the Gateway Centre so I decided to walk across to make some enquiries.

The Reception Office had a rather dark uninviting air about it but I went up to the high counter and spoke to the lady behind the desk, explaining my mission. With not much enthusiasm she enquired my name and said she ‘would ask’. She seemed to be rather longer on the telephone than I would have expected and she kept casting glances in my direction as she spoke. Eventually she said someone would be ‘down directly’. Sure enough a pleasant young man appeared and invited me to follow him. Up the stairs we went and I was led, not into a small office as I had expected, but into a large and busy room full of desks, telephones and people, a real hive of activity. I felt slightly daunted by this but nevertheless I followed the young man through the throng to the gentleman at the far end of the room who occupied the largest desk of all. Clearly this was the top man! I wondered how I came to deserve this treatment.

As I approached, the gentleman rose from his desk to shake my hand and motioned one of his staff to provide me with a chair. He smiled and asked how he might help. I wondered how my simple mission was going to live up to my entrance. However, I took a deep breath and explained about the PPA Publicity Day to be held in the Gateway and asked if a member of his staff might be able to help us. My request was listened to with courtesy and a number of questions followed during which he asked me where I lived. When I replied that I lived in Aberystwyth a slight query crossed his face and soon all was revealed.

It so happened that at the time the sitting MP for Shrewsbury was a Derek Conway and I had therefore received the red carpet treatment appropriate for the wife of an MP! We both saw the funny side of the misunderstanding. However, the ‘Shropshire Star’ did us proud. Not only did they send a member of staff to take part in our day but also a reporter and photographer. A full report of our training day appeared in the ‘Shropshire Star’ of Thursday 7 February 1985 under the heading ‘In Praise of Playgroups’. The article not only described our workshop day but also gave a real ‘plug’ for Playgroups quoting the number of Groups in Wales.

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In addition two photographs accompanied the article, one of Jenny Bullough demonstrating poster making and another showing four of us, Virginia Lowe, Myfanwy Baggs, Daphne Lewis and myself, hands cupped to our mouths as if 'shouting from the rooftops'! Sixty delegates attended our day, including ten from Shropshire, and the 'Shropshire Star' provided the biggest publicity coup of the event!



Shropshire Star

Shouting from the Rooftops