

PPA National Conference and AGM Memories

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It has been very interesting to look back at the developments in the Playgroup world in the 1960s and 70s. In that short time we changed from being just a 'Playgroup Movement', to being a fully fledged Pre-school Playgroups Association with clear-cut aims and objectives, a legal constitution, a network of co-ordinating committees at Branch, County and Regional level and a well structured National Executive Council.

During these years I was heavily involved at local level, and was very much aware, in theory, of what was happening throughout Britain, but somehow, living as I did in West Wales, I never fully appreciated the sheer size and power of PPA until I attended my first National Conference and AGM at Reading in 1978. It was quite an eye-opener to see hundreds and hundreds of PPA members converging on the Conference venue, all full of drive and enthusiasm, and to have the opportunity to listen to talks by a range of experts who all, obviously, were totally supportive of what we were trying to achieve.

By the time of the Reading Conference a clear pattern had evolved for the programme for the weekend. Members arrived on the Friday afternoon. There was a short welcome ceremony and then a keynote address that evening. Saturday was devoted to the AGM itself. This followed standard AGM format with Chairman's address, Reports, Financial Statement and follow-up matters, and then discussion and voting on the many proposals, which had been put to the meeting. A large number of members turned up as day visitors for the AGM. There was always keen interest in the discussions and many contributions from the floor: indeed some AGMs proved to be extremely lengthy. Saturday evening usually offered a more relaxing programme. Sunday morning began with an Inter-

denominational Church Service and this was always surprisingly well attended. After coffee there would be another important lecture. On Sunday afternoon there would be a closing ceremony, which included a presentation by members of the PPA Region which was due to host the Conference in the coming year.

This may not sound too taxing a weekend but the above list is only a basic outline of the many activities which were available. It would have been quite impossible for any one individual to participate in them all. There were discussion groups, question and answer sessions, National Committee surgeries, craft demonstrations and workshops. Even more appealing was the opportunity to shop in the huge displays put on by the commercial exhibitors who arrived and set up their stalls each year with a wide range of stock. It was possible to purchase everything needed for a playgroup, from giant outdoor play equipment structures to tiny items of stationery. Prices were always very favourable because the exhibitors made a point of offering generous Conference discounts. There was, too, a further opportunity to shop as many playgroups, branches, regions and even individual members set up fundraising stalls and sold a range of crafts, Conference souvenirs and other goodies.

It is perhaps unfair to mention that not everyone had the stamina to give 100% attention to the business of the Conference. On occasion members could be seen sneaking back to their rooms with large carrier bags, which indicated that they had been enjoying the opportunity of paying a visit to the local fashion stores and when we were at Bournemouth (1989) the temptation of hot sun and golden sands obviously proved too much for a number of the ‘weaker brethren’.

When I delve into a ragbag of memories from the twelve Conferences, which I attended between 1978 and 1989, I am surprised to find that my clearest memories are of minor events of no importance, while the weighty words of wisdom of the great experts have (with one or two notable exceptions) faded from my mind.

So here are a few memories to share:

I shall never forget the sheer bliss of our journey to the Newcastle Conference. We travelled First Class (an unheard of luxury in those days) thanks to the vouchers on the detergent packets, which we had been hoarding for months.

PPA Conferences were mostly held on University premises but we could not always have the use of a hall which would be large enough for the main sessions. At Reading, in a chilly spring, we sat in a huge marquee surrounded by roaring, and terrifying, gas heaters. At Nottingham the magnificent marquee stood staunchly against gales which buffeted the canvas walls and set the ornate electric chandeliers swinging wildly overhead.

In Birmingham we were housed in High Hall on the Campus, 20 floors up. We had marvellous views of course, but the provision of lifts indicated that the hall had been designed for young athletic students. By the last day some of us had strong leg muscles from climbing stairs, others had varicose veins from standing waiting patiently for the lift.

London, 1982, was, for me, the busiest of all the Conferences. We ran round making detailed notes on all the things that we *should do*, all the things that we *should not do* and all the things that we *might improve upon*, for our own Conference, the following year.

Llandudno, 1983, was, of course, just perfect in every detail! And, a year later, Exeter was delightfully relaxing – this time, thankfully, it was all someone else's worry.

Welcome to Wales song from London A.G.M.

At the PPA AGM held in London in 1982 the Conference ended with an invitation to members to come to the AGM the following year, 1983, which was to be held in Llandudno hosted by the Wales members. The invitation was appropriately presented in song. This was it –

‘You who come from Yorkshire and far off Humberside,
From Northern groups or North-West , on sunny Merseyside,
All you folk from Midlands, no matter East or West,
Of roads that you could follow, Llandudno’s the best.

**(Chorus) Croeso! Croeso! Croeso i chwi
That means Wales sings a welcome for 1983!**

We’ve friends in Munchan Gladbach and Wales’ linked to Hong Kong,
From Eastern parts and South-East, from London too belong,
We’ve sisters come from Ireland, from Scotland, Eire too,
From Southern and South-West - All of you.

**Croeso! Croeso! Croeso i chwi
That means Wales sings a welcome for 1983!**

Organisers, County Reps, Mums and Dads and you,
With sisters, grans and aunties, even toddlers too –
All relatives we gather, and friends can join the troop
We welcome every brick who builds playgroup.

**Croeso! Croeso! Croeso i chwi
That means Wales sings a welcome for 1983!**