

# PPA Invades Llandudno

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The most memorable year for me in Wales PPA was 1983 when PPA's National AGM and Conference was held in Llandudno. The National Executive Committee in 1981 had accepted a proposal from Wales PPA to host the AGM and Conference in Wales in 1983.

Thus began two years of planning.

The AGM and Conference had previously been held on University campuses but we did it differently. Our first suggestion had been to hold the event in Pontins Holiday Camp at Prestatyn, but we found that the holiday camp had recently changed hands and become self-catering which wasn't feasible for a busy weekend event. However, a new Conference Centre, adjoining the Arcadia Theatre, had just opened in Llandudno. This complex would provide excellent exhibition space, offices and a meeting place seating 1,100. The hotels on the Prom could accommodate all the delegates and the Astra Theatre, a short distance from the Prom, had 1,700 seats, more than enough for the National AGM. The NEC agreed that we should go ahead in Llandudno.

The Wales PPA Regional Council had decided that the Conference should be the responsibility of PPA throughout Wales. A Conference Committee was set up with representatives from each County, together with the National Adviser, one Development Officer, the NEC representative, the Bookings Team leader, the Editor of the Conference Booklet, the Treasurer and myself as Chairman. Each County took on a specific area of work under the leadership of its Conference Committee representative. We had had experience of holding our own AGMs in Wales but this was a much greater undertaking. Most of us had attended previous National Conferences in England and had some idea of what was involved;

we also gained a lot of experience and advice from the 1982 Conference held in London and I had several meetings with Eira Leach, the London Chairman. But, none of us had done anything like this before and we were all amateurs. It was a daunting task and meticulous planning was needed. We had all, however, learnt a great deal from our work in Wales PPA, we knew how to play, how to negotiate, how to approach officials, how to work as a team, how to delegate and not interfere. We looked forward to the undertaking with enthusiasm, some trepidation and a full awareness of the commitment we had taken on.

Our first task was to check out the accommodation. Angela Wilkinson (our Hotels Liaison Officer) and I had an initial meeting with Peter Hall, the Director of Tourism for Aberconwy. He was extremely helpful, though I think he had some doubts about our ability to take on successfully such a big task, but he did not know PPA then! The Conference Centre seemed ideal and we would be charged rent only for the exhibition area and the Council would also pay the rent for the Astra Theatre, which would be needed for the Opening Ceremony and for the AGM.

Early in 1982 the Conference Committee met in Llandudno and all the hotels on the Prom were visited by two or three committee members with questionnaires about prices, accommodation and meeting rooms. We found the hotel managers helpful and courteous. Inevitably, prices varied but we worked out a common booking fee for the delegates and some gained a little and others lost a little. (We did have a lower fee at four hotels whose prices were very much lower, and each English Region was allocated a number of these cheaper places.) Each time I visited Llandudno I stayed in a different hotel and thus got the feel of the place. Eleven hotels were booked initially.

From previous conferences we expected about 1,200 delegates to attend. A Bookings Team, under the leadership of Mary Foden, was set up. This team was crucial to the success of the enterprise. Delegates applied to the booking office and were allocated individual rooms. Bookings were not straightforward as individual requirements and individual choices for speakers, concerts, trips and mode of travel had to be taken into account. The Bookings Team, all volunteers, worked full-time for at least six months.

By the end of December 1,100 delegates had applied. However, when the Bookings Team met again after the Christmas break, another 300 applications were awaiting and a further four hotels had to be booked.

Meanwhile other groups were meeting and working hard on all aspects of the Conference – exhibitions, transport, conference booklet, hotel hostessing, sponsorship, entertainment. For several months PPA members were working intensively to ensure that the Conference ran smoothly and that all those attending enjoyed a fulfilling and worthwhile weekend.

The title of the Conference was ‘The Challenge of Diversity’/Sialens Amrywiaeth, chosen partly because members who attended meetings in London were frequently having to say ‘but Wales is different’ (we were funded by the Welsh Office and the grant system was different). Our programme, therefore, reflected diversity with speakers on Multiculturalism, Special Needs and Bilingualism as well as other themes.

The Conference opened in the Astra Theatre – which no longer exists. Delegates gasped in amazement as the great Wurlitzer organ rose through the floor with the organist Robinson-Cleaver playing traditional Welsh music. The Welsh atmosphere was further enhanced by the beautiful and poignant playing of the harpist. The Conference was formally opened by Sir Wyn Roberts, Under Secretary of State for Wales.

Then the opening speaker. We were extremely fortunate that Jerome Bruner, internationally known and acclaimed for his work on the value of play in the education and development of children, had accepted our invitation to speak at the Conference. His speech ‘Play, Thought and Language’ was inspirational. He spoke about what he considered to be the fundamental functions of play in the activity of children. His final sentence ‘Play under the control of the player gives to the child his first and the most crucial opportunity to have the courage to think, to talk and perhaps even to be himself’. Now in the utilitarian atmosphere of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we need to be reminded of the work of Bruner and the value of play in the life and education of young children.

The first evening ended with gatherings for the different Regions in the hotels. A very full day.

Daytime on Saturday was the AGM which was the responsibility of the NEC of PPA and the Wales Region's role was peripheral, mainly to provide the facilities. In the evening came the event which is most remembered by those attending the weekend. The Rhosllanerchrugog Male Voice Choir. It was an absolutely superb concert and the enthusiasm of everyone was overwhelming, perhaps most especially of Juliet Baxter, Chairman of the NEC. The concert had been sponsored by Aberconwy Council and had been arranged by our Wales National Adviser. Members of the Choir continued to entertain in one of the hotels until the early hours. Even so, some delegates managed to get up to attend Church Services early on Sunday morning, before attending one of the five speakers reflecting the theme of diversity: 'Working in a Multicultural Society', 'Supporting Children with Special Needs', 'Living with Two Languages'; the other two talks were, 'The Child and the Group' and 'Teenagers in Playgroups'.

The closing address in the afternoon was by Hywel Griffiths, Director of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. The title of his address was 'A Thousand Flowers'. The quotation, he said, came from a speech by Chairman Mao 'let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend'. Hywel Griffiths used this to illustrate the 'Challenge of Diversity'.

This outline gives the bare bones of the AGM and Conference and cannot convey the excitement and enthusiasm of the weekend. About two hundred members of Wales PPA were actively involved; many were hostesses in the hotels, being on hand throughout the Conference and ensuring that everyone was looked after and welcomed to Wales. The weekend brought together, for the first time, members from all over Wales who had been working in their own Counties for months beforehand. It was a great learning experience and I feel sure that the experience gave us the confidence to establish Wales PPA as an independent organisation four years later.

For me it had been an exhilarating experience. I worked full time for about six months as did several other members of the Team. My husband commented that it had taken the Falklands Task Force a week to prepare and why had it taken us two years to set up a two day conference!