

9/25/1998

Dear Alf

I have now had time to read through your letters and documents, and as you might expect I have some comments, but on the whole I agree with the constitutional changes and I present my views below.

I think that we have a busy time ahead of us and I look forward to working with you to drive forward those changes which are necessary to modernize the WNGGA, both in practice and in thought, and also to place the Association on a more stable and prominent ground within the North American Welsh community.

Let's get to the constitution first: Is there anywhere where this document is in electronic form to make it easier to detail the changes? If there is not then I shall endeavor to put it into one. With the drive towards a new relationship with venue committees, I see the constitution changing regularly over the next few years and an electronic form is essential to keep up.

As I said last week, I think your review of the history is excellent and fascinating. I have some comments to the analysis of distribution: I agree that there is a clear argument for the distribution of trustees to be seen to be equitable across regions, and also that Canada is in some way a special case. My suggestion of division of US into 3 regions, east, mid and west was not based particularly on member distribution, rather than on psychological considerations. I am a representative of the west, and live in the west. However, it has been pointed out to me that a west representative lives in Kansas. People in the west do not regard Kansas as being so. The WNGGA is not well known in the west. Few people even knew about the organization until we held the event in Bellevue in 1994. If we wish to increase the profile of understanding and knowledge about the Association then we should have people on the ground, easily accessible rather than half way across the country. Simply adding more numbers within the present geographical distribution is not going to alter this psychology, all the new trustees may be from Kansas.

However, the two suggestions need to be circulated for opinion. You asked in your letter if I wanted you to do so, I have no objection, but perhaps it should go along with a letter from myself as chair of the committee.

This is what I shall do, if you agree: I will combine your letter and analysis along with one of mine and together they will make some proposals for discussion and agreement. I will place a time deadline on this. This letter will go out by the end of this month and I shall send it to the constitution review committee first, yourself, IPP Ex. Dir. and Long range planning chair. I will ask them to respond within two weeks so that we can present the proposal to the board of trustees in Ontario, or before, for acceptance.

Other points: (and your comments and responses are anticipated)

1. Do we have a written job description for the Ex. Dir? In the light of the constitutional review, we must have one.
2. Membership: We have had several repeated discussions as to how to attract and increase membership and over the last few weeks I have given this some lateral thoughts, stimulated by observations at Columbus. I have come to the conclusion that we miss the best opportunity to recruit, the annual Gymanfa Ganu. If you view the event from the sidelines, the WNGGA is hardly evident. Many of the people who attend probably have no concept of how the event is organized or structured and of the role of the WNGGA. We have to become more visible, and I mean more visible than just a table in the market place. We hide in meetings all the time and never meet the people. Your accession to the presidency was a big public non event. The rank and file members were told only at the afternoon session of the Gymanfa, when you were introduced by Cerwyn. I must follow this up by asking when will the rank and file be told about my appointment as VP, and of Lynn as Secretary and David as Treasurer? We miss some great opportunities to publicize the organization and the work that we do. One of my self imposed tasks this coming year is to put together plans whereby the WNGGA is more visible and responsive to the membership. I think this is also going to include a restructuring of the WNGGA meeting schedule over the weekend. Honestly, we have to remove at least one of the four that we have, to give us more time to circulate. If we can show ourselves as a strong contributing part to the weekend, I think we will pick up members as well as us participating more in the occasion.
3. When we ran the event in Bellevue, there was much discussion and confusion about the payment of hotel rooms by the National organizing committee. Since 1995, I have heard nothing on this subject therefore I assume that we have rules in place. What are these?
4. Has anyone solicited or offered venues for beyond 2,000? I have been working on several groups over here but so far with no success, and I would like now to push harder with some specific dates in mind.

So I 'll finish for now, I have to think about finding a job at some time. Look forward to hearing from you, and to a productive year.

Regards

alan

10/9/1998

Dear Alf,

I am beginning to work on the letters you sent and some of the ideas. We are not far apart.

Let's take them one at a time, although a lot of them overlap. Trustee distribution. I think whether you like it or not, there is some psychology to membership decisions. I agree with you that compartmentalization at a fine level is very destructive, but the opposite is also the case by the apparent lack of visibility of local representation. To us in the west, Kansas is in the east, plain and simple. Therefore if our representatives are from that part of the world, the society becomes an 'eastern society'. The ability of a more local trustee can overcome issues of distance and help to spread the word verbally at events like local Gymanfaoedd and St. David's Day celebrations, as I have done for the last few years. Despite the fact that I would like more, I suspect that there are now more members from the northwest than for a very long time. A representative who lives 500-1000 miles away cannot do this personal service, as limited as it is even within the region. While trustee distribution has to be related to membership, we have also to sell locally to new members.

Tied to this, I think we both agree that membership goes along with exposure. The National has been to the "west" 4 times in the last 20 years (Portland, Vancouver, Victoria and Bellevue, and two of those qualify as Canadian), 8 if you include Minnesota, St. Paul, Kansas and Milwaukee. The rest of the time it is over in the east or in Canada (Toronto and Montreal). What incentive is there for persons in California or Colorado or Arizona?

I must admit to being very frustrated in Columbus at both the WNGGA and NWAFF meetings with the discussions of membership. There is continually the same discussion and ideas, despite the fact that several of us have tried to introduce new ideas. Membership is important but before membership we have to decide **what it is we are selling**. Is it just membership in an organization or more, I would hope more. WNGGA should be focussing on what it takes to become THE North American Welsh Society not just another Welsh society competing, for the same money, with NWAFF, the local society etc. Obviously membership is important for survival, but unless we convince people that it is worth giving us money we are always going to fight the battle, because those who believe they get nothing will continually drop out. Fighting from membership like this is painful and costly. This is why I believe that we do not make enough of an effort at the National itself. There we have a captive population who can see the benefits first hand and if we can entice and hold those we have a good start. (How many people who come to Columbus were not members?). I propose that:

- With every registration acknowledgement we should send a flyer publicizing WNGGA, and offering a bonus for joining, e.g. free admission to one seminar. This flyer must be visually attractive and not just a text information which few people read.

- When each member registers or joins in Minneapolis he/she should be given a special identifier to display membership.
- WNGGA should have a manned table *adjacent to registration* to greet members and give out the identifiers.

A group should be designated to do this and collect volunteers who will man the table.

In terms of other approaches on a National scale. Your ideas for membership committee are appropriate but it needs to be more than just contacting potential members by telephone etc. Cold calling is abysmal both for the recipient and for the caller. (I know, I have been both). How can we attract? What can we give/tempt with? What is important? Where is the future? The future is in information. Wales is changing and we in North America have to go along with that. Over the coming years, our membership will be technologically literate and there we have the opportunity to provide the membership with something tangible. The premiere (some say) Welsh newspaper is the Western Mail, which is available through the internet by subscription.

- Let us approach the Western Mail and ask if they would be prepared to offer their site to our members free or by significantly reduced subscription. Our membership would then have the opportunity of obtaining first hand information on Wales.

It is important, as you say, that the local committee is given visibility and significant recognition for the Gymanfa weekend, but our contribution has to be seen to be significant also. However, we have to decide our criteria for success. In this last decade, we said in Columbus that we have had two failures. These were failures on economic grounds not social. The programs in both were good: it was the organization that was bad and the lack of financial acumen that was appalling. This is the base reason for the new concept. The WNGGA will become much more involved in the planning of the event. I am not too concerned about the content of the weekend, every location should have something to characterize it, but the reality is that every component of the weekend has to be budgeted sensibly and budgeted for an overall profit. (Remember, the Gymanfa itself does not make a profit). One solution to becoming more involved is for WNGGA to take responsibility for more of the activities. e.g. In 1994 I urged the WNGGA to take responsibility for an eisteddfod, (the constitution allows this). Focussing on registration and control of the money is not the only criterion. We want to be seen to be for preserving Welsh activities as well as for being fiscally practical.

So, what can we do to make ourselves more visible at the National, in addition to the booth described above? We need short but clearly striking opening and closing ceremonies where we are seen to be part of the occasion. I have broached this issue with Ellis in conversation and e-mail and he will be here in Seattle in November and I will talk again about this with him. I know that it was felt that the closing ceremony in particular became lengthy, but now it is too cold. These two ceremonies are the links between years and should be made to be such.

Thanks for the information about the removal of the EXCOM meeting. I think that there are other moves we can make.

Elect the new officers at the Friday trustees meeting and introduce them at the AGM.

Ask the new president to address the trustees at the end of the Friday meeting, this would alleviate the trustees' Sunday meeting also. (With the spare time the trustees could man the stall in rotation). New officers must also be introduced to the convention at the Gymanfa as part of our visibility plan. This could be in the closing ceremony. After I talk with Ellis I will come up with a more clear proposal for the board.

Finally, you hit on another issue which I did not broach in my last letter, but which I am quite concerned about, and that is election to the board. Jack Nesbitt has the approach that all chairpersons of the labo rday events should be made a trustee. I disagree with that opinion. It would have been a travesty if say, Yvonne Evans or David Williams were appointed. Their intellectual and planning quality were not suitable for the position. I also am unhappy about the election of Mary Ellen to the board this past Gymanfa. I am not saying that she should never be elected to the board, but there has to be fairness to others who are nominated and who have expressed a willingness to serve. The chairman of an event is at a distinct advantage in that he/she is in the limelight throughout the weekend, and there has to be a significant vote for visibility over those who people do not immediately recognize. I think that we should consider for the constitution a ruling that chairpersons cannot be nominated to the board of trustees until the year after their event (or words to that effect). This also gives time to see how committed they are to the cause.

This actually is the second version of the letter. I was half way through the first and the lights went out. Despite automatic save, I lost quite a lot. Also I am sending this be e mail. I write in word and then cut and paste into the e-mail message. Saves money that way. Let me know if you have any problems in recovery.

If you agree with some of these ideas then we have to start identifying people to work on them. I have not been copying this correspondence to Lynn for the archives, perhaps we should do so.

Regards
alan