Wales’ World Peace Campaigns of the 1920s and 30s

Excerpt from Welsh League of Nations Union Report, 1927 – now displayed as a linen hanging in the vestibule of Wales’ Temple of Peace & Health.

In the entrance vestibule of Wales’ Temple of Peace, visitors pass two intriguing linen hangings proclaiming the achievements of ‘Welsh Efforts for World Peace’ in the years that followed WW1 – each of which sound almost too big to be possible; each of which beg the question “what’s the story?” And perhaps most of all... How, What and Why?

How could a nation as small as Wales seemingly mobilise what sounds like every household and institution, in the pursuit of something as big and broad and seemingly unattainable as world peace?

Why this Wales-wide profusion of activity... and where did it go? Why don’t we know about it today... How could something so big fade from history, from our collective memory? Has it become subsumed within national identity?

What would it take today, in a world riven with conflicting and divided views from Brexit to Trump to Refugees and Equalities, to unite people once more around a shared mission of building a better world for future generations?
The Mission that started Wales’ Temple of Peace

Visitors arriving at the North Door of Wales’ Temple of Peace – entrance to the ‘Peace Wing’ occupied today by WCIA (the Welsh Centre for International Affairs) and Wales’ leading internationalist organisations – are greeted by a seemingly out-of-date letterbox, in itself a treasured part of the building’s heritage, that begs to be opened and reveal its stories… It’s messages from the past.

Join us to look through the letterbox… to the incredible movement whose mission inspired creation of the Temple of Peace, and whose founder perhaps deserves to go down in history as one of Wales’ and world’s most dynamic yet understated peacemakers: Gwilym Davies.

WLoNU letterbox at the Temple of Peace today.

The Welsh League of Nations Union (WLoNU) was first proposed from the stage of the National Eisteddfod (Festival of Wales), in Neath in 1919, by David Davies of Llandinam – a soldier returned from the trenches horrified by war, and determined to support his fellow countrymen and women in the pursuit not just of an end to WW1 at the Armistice – but that ‘Never Again’ should be translated into action that ensured a Great War would literally happen ‘Never Again’. A peace that would endure for future generations, and protect their own children.

“In the silent moments of our remembrance, we confronted the great phantom host which included the dearest friends of our youth. They would have become restive at the thought of what we – who know now what war means – are now doing to save their dear ones from a similar fate... They say:

“What are you doing about it all? Is it to be nothing... but the laying of wreaths and blowing of last posts?”

David Davies, 1937 Reunion of his Royal Welsh Fusiliers Battalion, Llandinam

It was a rallying cry that struck to the heart of an anguished nation in which every household had lost loved ones; and 3,000 people signed up on the Maes (festival site). One of those who came forward was a preacher from Cwmrhyddfa, the Rev Gwilym Davies – who saw in the Welsh League the not just the prospect, but the urgent human need for an organisation that could establish Wales as a “Missionary Nation to the World in the Spreading of Peace”.”
Wales had a long history of peacemakers, such as the ‘Apostle of Peace’ Henry Richard who was one of a line of Welshmen to coordinate the (London-based) Peace Society, of which he was secretary for 40 years. Inspired by figures such as Joseph Tregellis Price of Neath, Welsh American descendent Elihu Burritt and many other figures, Gwilym Davies shared with many a strong sense that Welsh identity was and should be inherently rooted in peace through an internationalist outlook. If World War 1 had taught any lessons, for many in the population in Wales it was that ‘law over war’ was only way forward.

**By the late 1920s, the Welsh League of Nation Union would become one of Wales’ biggest membership organisations, with over 1,000 local community branches and 61,000 members actively campaigning on international issues of the day.**

The story of the campaigning movement itself follows; But at the heart of the movement one man emerged, who was considered by many the ‘dynamo’ of Wales’ internationalist movements through the Interwar years: **Gwilym Davies (1879-1955).**

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Portrait and tribute to Gwilym Davies on the 1962 cover of the 40th Annual Youth Message of Peace & Goodwill – digitised for viewing on People’s Collection Wales.
The Man at the Heart of the Mission

Co-founder of the Welsh League of Nations Union (alongside David Davies) in 1920, Gwilym Davies is chiefly celebrated today as founder of Wales’ annual ‘Youth Message of Peace & Goodwill’, and Urdd Gobaith Cymru – the Welsh youth movement – in 1922. Biographies of Gwilym Davies have traditionally taken quite a broad perspective of his many life achievements, involvement in Welsh civil society organisations and communities, and internationally – but usually focus in on his involvement with the Peace & Goodwill Message, which is now being more extensively researched.

- Wales for Peace pages on the Youth Peace Message and Urdd pages on the Peace Message today and heritage of the message.
- Digitised materials from 1922- recent on People’s Collection Wales – A Message of Peace & Goodwill.
- Timeline of Peace & Goodwill Messages on Sutori
- An international youth exchange project and training between WCIA, UNA exchange and the Urdd in 2017 explored reciprocal messages from overseas youth movements, producing a blog of the project and digitised archive of international responses on PCW.
- Activities from recent Urdd Eisteddfods in Flint (2016), Bridgend (2017), and Powys (2018)
- A Doctorate on the Peace & Goodwill Message heritage is being developed through IGES at Aberystwyth University, and a dissertation by Siwan Dafydd through Birmingham University

However, the Welsh League of Nations Union between 1922 and 1939 grew into one of Wales’ most dynamic and widespread campaigning movements under his leadership, and this story has been little told – let alone Gwilym Davies’s role within it.

This feature seeks to explore this remarkable period of post-WW1 Peace Activism – and its ultimate contribution to the post-WW2 creation of the United Nations, international cooperation and Welsh identity over the 75 years since.

References on Gwilym Davies

- The Gwilym Davies Archives are held at the National Library of Wales (NLW) in Aberystwyth. Extensive correspondence relating to his work also appears in the…
- Lord Davies of Llandinam Papers at NLW;
- Welsh League of Nations Union archives at NLW;
- and in the Temple of Peace Collections.
- Gwilym Davies – Wikipedia Profile
- Gwilym Davies – Dictionary of Welsh Biography by Mary Auronwy James

Writings of Gwilym Davies

Welsh Outlook Magazine, October 1930 – carrying an article by Gwilym Davies entitled ‘Wales and the World’
Many important articles by him appeared in The Welsh Outlook, Yr Efrydydd, and Y Drysorfa; some of the Welsh ones were collected in *Y Byd Ddoe a Heddiw* (1938). His article in Y Drysorfa, 1942, on the Welsh Nationalist Party (Plaid Cymru) aroused considerable controversy. Other publications include:

- *International Education in the Schools of Wales and Monmouthshire* (1926),
- *The Ordeal of Geneva* (1933),
- *Intellectual co-operation between the Wars* (1943), and
- *The Gregynog Conferences on International Education 1922-37* (1952),

### Early Life, Ministry & Welsh School of Social Service

Gwilym Davies was born in Bedlinog, Merthyr Tydfil, and followed in his father’s footsteps as a Baptist preacher from 1895 before gaining a scholarship to Jesus College, Oxford where he was editor of the Baptist Outlook magazine – a foretaste of the prolific writing he would generate through his life. However, from his student days onwards Gwilym Davies suffered from poor health throughout much of his life – which perhaps makes his life achievements all the more remarkable.

From 1906, he was ordained a Minister in Broadhaven, Pembrokeshire, going on to serve in Carmarthen, Abergavenny and Llandrindod Wells over the following decade. He struck up a close friendship with the young David Davies of Llandinam, recently elected Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire – an avid internationalist and energetic social reformer – who saw in Gwilym Davies a dynamic organiser who could help him realise his visions for improving Welsh society. In 1911, they founded the **Welsh School of Social Services**.

Gwilym Davies was a proud pacifist, and following World War One, he sought to play an activist role as a ‘missionary for the cause of international peace’ – carrying on the tradition of the Welsh pioneers Richard Price, Robert Owen, and Henry Richard. In 1922, he retired from Ministry, to found some of Wales’ most enduring internationalist movements. Biographer J. E. Meredith compared Gwilym Davies and ‘Apostle of Peace’ Henry Richard’s backgrounds quite directly:

> “With the neighbouring parliamentary MP of Henry Richard... both were sons of ministers of religion, both themselves were ordained ministers of a nonconformist denomination and gave up ministers in order to devote time to their causes they were both intellectually and mutually engaged in.”
David Davies had first proposed the idea a ‘Welsh League of Nations Union’ at the National Eisteddfod in Neath in August 1918 – 4 months before the end of WW1. Given broad unease at the terms of the Paris Peace Process / Treaty of Versailles, which imposed crippling reparations on the people of Germany, many Welsh men and women were supportive of an International League of Nations in principle.

Although a (25 May) 1920 meeting in Llandrindod Wells had formed a Committee linking to the London-based League of Nations Union, it seems (from records of discussions in 1921-22) this had not yet been translated into an effective campaigning body in Wales.

In January 1922, David Davies and Gwilym Davies met in Llandinam to set about founding and properly funding a distinct, national organisation that would ‘mobilise the people of Gwalia’ – independent, though complementary, to the UK Union.

- Plas Dinam Meeting notes and correspondence, 1922 – organisational needs for an effective peace movement.
- Honorary Director’s Report, April 9 1922 – establishing an office for nationwide peace campaigning, and reviewing branch and membership structures and relationship to the UK League of Nations body.
- First public meeting in Llandrindod Wells, Easter 1922 – building a membership base and Wales-wide campaign
A June 1922 letter from Gwilym Davies, on the early successes of the first Youth Peace & Goodwill Message, broadcast by Marconi Telegraph and picked up by the Eiffel Tower.

From 1922, Gwilym Davies threw himself into organising a Campaign for World Peace unlike any the world had seen before: to involve every man, woman and child in Wales in a ‘mission for internationalism’. An enthusiastic adopter of new communications technologies, mass media and community outreach, as ‘Honorary Director’ of the Welsh League of Nations Union Gwilym Davies, created and coordinated a number of nationwide peace campaigns:

- Gwilym Davies became the first person in history to radio broadcast in Welsh, on St David’s Day 1923, when he broadcast the
- The Welsh Women’s Peace Petition to America of 1923, signed by 390,296 women Wales-wide, calling for the USA to join and lead the League of Nations.
- The world’s first Global Education / World Citizenship curriculum for teachers and schools, developed through establishing a Welsh Education Advisory Committee (WEAC). Annual Gregynog Conferences on International Education were hosted by the Davies Sisters of Llandinam, Gwendoline and Margaret, and facilitated by Gwilym Davies.
- From 1930, he supported Annie Hughes-Griffiths as Chair in developing the Women’s Advisory Committee, which after WW2 evolved into CEWC Cymru, the Council for Education in World Citizenship.
- A Peace Campaign and Annual Offering across the Churches of Wales.
- A 1925 Peace Memorial Petition of Wales’ Faith Leaders to the faith movements of America.
- A 1929 general election manifesto for ‘Teachers and World Peace’

The campaigning activities of the Welsh League of Nations Union can be explored through their Annual Reports 1922-45, digitised as part of WCIA’s ‘Wales for Peace’ project with support of volunteers. The original booklets can be viewed in the Temple of Peace Archives, and in the National Library of Wales – David Davies of Llandinam Papers – as well as digitised on People’s Collection Wales (below).
Education Activities and the Welsh Education Advisory Committee (WEAC)

Gwilym Davies travelled extensively in a role sometimes described as Welsh civil society’s ‘peace ambassador to the world’ – spending considerable time at the Headquarters of the League of Nations in Geneva, the ‘Palace of Nations’. He wrote regular updates on international affairs and current issues of peace and conflict for the bulletins of the Welsh League of Nations Union, as well as columns for the Welsh Outlook magazine, Headway (the journal of the UK League) Western Mail and many newspapers. His opinion pieces marked him out as one of Wales’ foremost influencers on international issues.

During the 1920s-30s, the work of the [Welsh Education Advisory Committee (WEAC)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_Education_Advisory_COMMITTEE) in developing a ‘curriculum for schools that teaches the values and principles of the League of Nations’ drew worldwide acclaim – the world’s first Global Education, Global Citizenship or Peace Education curriculum programme, became a ‘model of best practice’ for educationalists worldwide.

Examples of Global Citizenship Education initiatives by the Welsh League that have survived ‘in the archives’ include:

- **Teachers and World Peace, 1929** – guidance for teachers, also produced into a manifesto to influence candidates for the [1929 General Election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1929_Welsh_Election)
- **World Friendship Stories** publication
- The [Geneva Scholarship Scheme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva_Scholarship_Scheme) enabled pupils who won the WLoNU’s Citizenship Competitions, to travel to Geneva and experience the League of Nations in action.
- **Peace Essays and Exams**
- **International Summer School scholarships** – many continued after WW2 under CEWC.
- **Festivals of Youth**

From 1931, the [Women’s Advisory Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_Advisory_Committee%2C_Welsh_League_of_Nations_Union) under the leadership of Annie-Jane Hughes Griffiths, who had led the 1924 Welsh Women’s Peace Petition Delegation to America, played an increasingly lead role in coordinating the educational activities of the League in Wales. Beyond WW2, the 2 bodies (WAC and WEAC) came together under the auspices of [CEWC Cymru](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CEWC_Cymru) – the Welsh Council for Education in World Citizenship – which has continued to support schools with global education to the present day, having as recently as 2015 merged into the Welsh Centre for International Affairs as the ‘Global Learning’ arm of WCIA’s work. A long and strong heritage indeed.
### Welsh League of Nations Union (WLoNU) Annual Reports and Notable Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Founding of Welsh League of Nations Union, Youth Message of Peace &amp; Goodwill first broadcast</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Women’s Peace Petition campaign, Gregynog Teachers Conferences on International Education founded</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Women’s Peace Delegation to America, ‘Welsh Churches and World Peace’ Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Faith Leaders Petition to America</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>League of Nations Int’l Congress held in Aberystwyth, N Wales Women’s Peace Pilgrimage for ‘Law not War’</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>Temple of Peace proposed as Wales’ national memorial to fallen of WW1</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>David Davies commissions new WLoNU HQ – a ‘Temple of Peace’, ‘Welsh Teachers and World Peace’ Manifesto published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Stock Market crash and onset of Great Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>WLoNU Women’s Advisory Committee (WAC) established – see records of meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Equity Tribunal Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Peace Ballot Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Festival of Youth</td>
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<td>1935</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Foundation Stone laid and construction starts on Wales’ Temple of Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Opening of Wales Temple of Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Outbreak of WW2; suspension of WLoNU activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>WLoNU / Gwilym Davies invited to develop proposals for UNESCO</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1944</td>
<td>WLoNU – UNA Wales combined Annual Report for 1943-1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1946</td>
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</table>

UNESCO

Death of Lord David Davies, founder and sponsor of WLoNU.

Lord Davies Memorial Fund

WLoNU becomes UNA Wales, with Inaugural meeting

Start of International Youth Service (IYS) and CEWC
Wales’ Global Movement: Branches, Membership and Participation in Internationalism

A typical ‘Plan of Campaign’ developed by Gwilym Davies with local branches – this being the 1922-23 programme for the Newport WLoNU.

Gwilym Davies placed a particularly strong emphasis on grassroots community participation in the Welsh League of Nations Union, with a comprehensive programme of activities led by local branches and activists, including initiatives such as:

- **Public meetings and debates** on topical issues of current international affairs.
- ‘**Lantern Lectures**’ (slide shows) on international issues.
- **Fundraising** for the work of the Welsh League, in particular through organising **annual Daffodil Days for Peace** (researched by Swansea University History student Rob Laker, as part of a heritage placement with WCIA in 2019).
- **Petitions and campaigns** to sway public / political opinion on peace issues such as the Arms Trade, and ‘Law not War’.
- **Marches and Peace Pilgrimages**, such as the **North Wales Women’s Peace Pilgrimage of 1926**.
- **Eisteddfod stalls**
- **School competitions** including the **Geneva Scholarship Scheme, Peace Essays and Exams**, and **International Summer School scholarships** – many continued after WW2 under CEWC.

Welsh Branches and Membership Figures

The table below emerges from analysis by Swansea History student Rob Laker, of the membership figures drawn from the Welsh League of Nations Union Report through the interwar years. Whilst proving impressive participation figures from any angle, they also highlight some changes, and reflections of the changing world environment within which the League of Nations Union was operating.
In 1930-31, the ‘apparent dip’ in membership was actually a change in presentation. Due to falling income, the Welsh League Council decided to measure paid memberships. It will be noted that the highest number of active local branches is the same year – suggesting voluntary and campaigner activity remained high.

However, as the Great Depression of 1930-31 took effect, this had 2 impacts: a sharp decrease in paid memberships, reflecting the unemployment and austerity situation; and some loss of faith in the League of Nations itself following the Manchuria Crisis.

Further reorganisation in 1934, and some presentational variations, result in some gaps in figures.

The highest paid members ever was marked in 1937, as Wales’ Temple of Peace was under construction – and as concerns escalated towards WW2.

With the outbreak of WW2, the Welsh League partially suspended work, although some figures are offered – though these may not represent similar measures of activity.

A general question / point of interest on Junior Membership Branches, is whether these were the predecessors, parallel organisations or the same local bodies as the Urdd Youth movements local Aelwyd’s or youth branches / chapters. Given the overlap in mission between the WLoNU, Peace Message and the Urdd, it seems quite possibly these local groups may be one and the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1924</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1926</th>
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<th>1928</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931-32</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adult Membership</td>
<td>18,110</td>
<td>26,345</td>
<td>31,299</td>
<td>34,999</td>
<td>36,689</td>
<td>39,223</td>
<td>41,822</td>
<td>43,050</td>
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<td>Junior Membership</td>
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<td>4,247</td>
<td>6,080</td>
<td>9,801</td>
<td>10,653</td>
<td>11,727</td>
<td>14,784</td>
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<td>30,592</td>
<td>37,379</td>
<td>44,800</td>
<td>47,342</td>
<td>50,950</td>
<td>56,606</td>
<td>61,262</td>
<td>26,800</td>
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<td>415</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>764</td>
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<td>Junior Branches</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>233</td>
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<td>Total Branches</td>
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<td>648</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>849</td>
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<td>Adult Membership</td>
<td>15,146</td>
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<td>13,537</td>
<td>15,675</td>
<td>18,255</td>
<td>12,745</td>
<td>13,018</td>
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<td>4,635</td>
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<td>Junior Membership</td>
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<td>9,290</td>
<td>6,780</td>
<td>9,216</td>
<td>3,881</td>
<td>2,342</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Membership</td>
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<td>13,630</td>
<td>13,537</td>
<td>24,701</td>
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<td>19,525</td>
<td>22,234</td>
<td>11,709</td>
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<td>538</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior Branches</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>298</td>
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<td>302</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Branches</td>
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<td>733</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>725</td>
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</table>
‘Daffodil Days’ and Funding of the Welsh League’s Peace Work

The funds of the League were generated through widespread Fundraising by Branches, through organising annual Daffodil Days for Peace (explored in depth by Swansea University History student Rob Laker. In 1927, branches Wales-wide contributed £1,507 12s 11d – approx. £93,000 today – towards the general running costs of the Welsh League, as well as funding their own local campaigns and activities.

View Google Map of Communities who organised Daffodil Days between 1925-39, collated by Swansea History student Rob Laker (zoom, or click on pins, to find specific communities).

As early as 1925, the Welsh League’s campaigning activities considerably outstripped their financial resources – which sometimes generated anxiety and frustration within the movement. However, David Davies regularly ‘bailed out’ the Welsh Council with donations to pay off the debts of increasingly ambitious campaigns that he believed essential to the preservation of peace, such as the Peace Ballot of 1935 (below).

However, this philanthropy-dependent model was not sustainable, and the post-WW2 United Nations Association (UNA) Wales were never able to replicate the levels of engagement – or indeed, campaign spending – of the Welsh League, particularly after the death in 1944 of Lord Davies.
The Wales Peace Ballot of 1935

A high point of Welsh League of Nations campaigning work was the Peace Ballot of 1935 – a UK-wide initiative by the League of Nations Union, in which Wales sought to ‘lead the way’ – or to ‘Top the Polls’ as Gwilym Davies put it.

The aim of the Peace Ballot was to canvass – and influence – public opinion on the escalating European Arms Race, and the role of the League of Nations (and responsibilities of its member governments) to lead international efforts to maintain the fragile post-WW1 peace. The Ballot posed 5 questions to every man and woman over the age of 18, ascertaining the balance of views:

1. For / against the League of Nations
2. For / against all round Disarmament
3. For / against abolition of naval and military Aircraft
4. For / against abolition of private manufacture of Arms
5. A – For / against Economic Action against Aggressor Nations
6. B – For / against Military Action against Aggressor Nations

Welsh League of Nations Union branches and campaigners led canvassing efforts in every county of Wales, succeeding in securing 5 of the 10 highest constituency returns in the UK – including Anglesey, Aberdare, Swansea, Rhondda and Merthyr Tydfil.

“In total, 1,025,040 people in Wales voted in the Peace Ballot – 62.3% of eligible registered voters”
View the 1935 Peace Ballot Archive on People’s Collection Wales

Whilst the Peace Ballot, and Wales’ leading role in it, was respected by many UK parliamentarians as an exceptional expression of democratic sentiment, in the fragile and fraught international political climate of the mid-1930s it was largely taken to justify an uneasy line of appeasement against the rise of Hitler, Mussolini and other aggressors. The 1936 Geneva Conference of the League of Nations, which followed the Abyssinia Crisis – the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy – was seen as a terminal failure of the League. But, as Gwilym Davies stated:

“No ‘Covenant’ can be made to work, if the nations will not work it.

It is not the League that has failed the nations; it is the nations that have failed the league.”
The dejection felt among Wales’ Peace campaigners was undoubtedly strong; however, the following passage gives a fascinating insight into the mind of this incredible man who managed to sustain the leadership and enthusiasm of a whole movement:

We who have worked for the League, who have served to the utmost of our strength, how are we to act now that we see our hopes dimmed and our plans frustrated?

The other day, I met a secretary of a branch who had done excellent work. He said that he was so disgusted with happenings in Geneva, he would do no more. The League had failed, the British Government had failed. Everything had failed. And he was giving up.

I felt sorry for him. He had not just that quality which makes a man stick to it in bitter weather, the teeth of the east wind. The conditions that prevail in Europe today are infinitely trying .. if we lack nerve to hold on grimly to our hopes, and struggle harder than ever for their realisation. Still that is the temper our fathers had for us, in winning the freedom of liberty that we enjoy. And that is the faith we must possess if we are to reap what we sow in the depressing days of disappointment.

“The League has proved itself useless.” VERY WELL! Let us here – and now – resolve that the League shall be made not only useful, but indispensable. Let us see present defeat a starting point for future victories. It is the challenge which face all of us, the “IF” with which we must wrestle...

Wales accepts the Challenge.

“If you can bear to hear the truth you’ve spoken, twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools; Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken, And stoop to build them up with worn-out tools;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew, To serve your turn long after you are gone; and so hold on when there is nothing in you

Except the will which says to them – “HOLD ON!”
Crowds gathered in the rain on 23 Nov 1938, to witness the historic opening of Wales’ Temple of Peace – by war-bereaved mother Minnie James from Dowlais, Merthyr.

Following the opening of Wales’ Temple of Peace in November 1938, Gwilym Davies’s expressed the hope that despite clouds of conflict on the horizon, this new headquarters for the Welsh League of Nations Union – and the Welsh people – would realise the hopes and dreams of generations...

“...for a world free from the scourge of war, free from the scourge of disease. Free to foster friendship with our fellow human kind; to Unite the Nations of our world as one, and to shape our shared futures – together.

And to never... never again forget the human cost of waging war before law; of ignoring internationalism... our common humanity.”

Uniting Nations: World War 2, UNESCO and UNA

Palace of Nations, Geneva – UN Headquarters

During World War 2, the Welsh Education Committee under his direction was asked to draft a model constitution for an international education organisation. The draft submitted by Gwilym Davies greatly influenced the creation of UNESCO, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Copies of a series of policy papers and drafts by Gwilym Davies between 1941-45, remain in the Temple of Peace collections, demonstrating how he fed in the ideas and experiences of Welsh educationalists as the concept developed prior to UNESCOs launch and 1st conference in Paris in Nov 1946.

Following the end of World War 2, the Welsh League of Nations Union – whose work had been largely suspended through hostilities – regrouped under Gwilym Davies’ Chairmanship, and seamlessly transitioned to become UNA Wales – the United National Association Welsh National Council.

An executive committee meeting, and the last meeting of WLoNU / first conference of UNA Wales, were held over October 27-28 1946 at the Temple of Peace and Health in Cardiff – then just 8 years old. Finally, the Temple was to become the ‘peacebuilding headquarters’ that it had been intended as – although sadly, Lord Davies of Llandinam had passed away just months before his dream, shattered by WW2, finally started to reach fruition.
The first Annual General Meeting of UNA Wales was held in Wrexham over May 30-31 1947, and Gwilym Davies was returned as the first President of UNA Wales – with William (Bill) Arnold becoming the first Secretary of UNA Wales (and de facto ‘Director’ of the Temple of Peace). It was decided to establish CEWC Cymru, the Council for Education in World Citizenship, as a separate but complementary body to UNA Wales, also operating from the Temple of Peace – so as to make a clearer distinction between educational and campaigning work (which had sometimes proven problematic prior to the outbreak of WW2).

The Temple of Peace and Health, meanwhile was going through similarly major revolutions in its South Wing – as the former Wales National Memorial Association for the eradication of Tuberculosis, established by David Davies in 1910, became one of the founding bodies of the new NHS National Health Service – for which the transitional authority through 1946-47 tasked with amalgamating all of Wales’ health bodies into the new service was headquartered in the Temple of Peace & Health. Following the NHS organisation, the Temple became the headquarters for the South Glamorgan Health Authority.

- View UNA Wales Archive materials on People’s Collection Wales.
- View UN Peacebuilders – Welsh Figureheads from 1996 “UN50” publication by Bill Davies, WCIA
Passing and Legacy of Gwilym Davies (1955)

As late as 1942, in the midst of WW2, Gwilym Davies had married Mary Elizabeth Ellis, the second woman to be appointed an inspector of schools in Wales (she was granted permission to marry and to retain her post till 1943). They lived in 8 Marine Terrace, Aberystwyth.

He was awarded the CBE (Commander of the British Empire) in the 1948 Honours list by Prime Minister Clement Attlee, for his services to peacebuilding and the people of Wales.

Leaflet for Gwilym Davies' Memorial Service, held at the Temple of Peace on 11 Feb 1955

For a man of such lifelong drive and dynamism, he suffered from poor health throughout much of his life; and on 29 January 1955, he passed away peacefully – and passed on his legacy of peace.

His memorial service was fittingly held in the Temple of Peace and Health in Cardiff, the building he was instrumental not only in creating – but in framing for a mission, to build a better world for generations to come. His ashes were scattered at Lavernock Point, Penarth, where the first Marconi radio message had been exchanged across water.

His peacebuilding work was to be carried forward by the United Nations Association (UNA) Wales, and CEWC (Council for Education in World Citizenship) at the Temple of Peace, both of which continue as the Welsh Centre for International Affairs today.

He 'bequeathed' the Youth Peace and Goodwill Message to be continued by the Urdd from 1956 onwards. It continues to be broadcast every year on May 18th, with participation from young people Wales-wide every year – as well as translations into many languages of the world, and responses from youth movements overseas.

The ‘Neges’ will be marking its centenary in 2022 – continuing a mission started by a modest man from Cwmrhymni, for a world of peace for future generations.

On May 18th, 2018, the Peace and Goodwill message of the young people of Wales was shared by Urdd Gobaith Cymru, from the young people of Mid Glamorgan. The message gives thanks for the opportunities available to young people and the hope that those opportunities are available to all young people – emphasising the need to listen to the voices of young people, and for young people to feel able to discuss and overcome problems.

View the 2019 Peace and Goodwill Message, Voice.
Author and Contributors

This article has been drawn together by Craig Owen, Peace Heritage Coordinator at WCIA from many volunteer and community contributors over the life of the Wales for Peace project 2014-19. Particular thanks are added for academic research by:

- Stuart Booker, Swansea University History doctoral student, who completed digitisation and tagging of the Welsh League of Nations Union reports over Summer 2019.
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- Dr Emma West, University of Birmingham, who drew together research and materials for the Temple of Peace’s 80th Anniversary programme and Gala Performance / reinterpretation, ‘A New Mecca’.