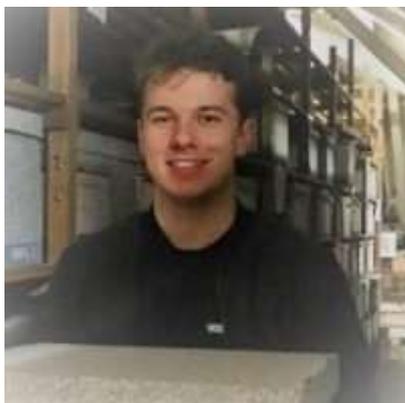


Daffodil Days of the 1920s-30s

Celebrating Wales-wide Community Activism on [#WorldPeaceDay](#)



Daffodil beds in [Wales' National Garden of Peace](#), outside the [National Temple of Peace and Health](#) opened in Cardiff in 1938.



Blog and research by WCIA Archives Intern **Rob Laker**, on placement with Wales for Peace from [Swansea University History Dept](#) over Summer 2019. Drawing on materials from the [National Library of Wales](#) and [Temple of Peace Archives](#); and Annual Reports of the Welsh League of Nations Union 1922-45 on [People's Collection Wales](#), digitised by WCIA (with support of Swansea doctoral student Stuart Booker) for future open access and research. Final edit by [Craig Owen, Wales for Peace](#).

Rob Laker, WCIA Archives Intern

This article is published as WCIA's #Peacemakers #FridayFeature to mark **World Peace Day 2019**, celebrating Welsh global activism past, present and future.

The Story of Wales' 'Daffodil Days for Peace'

In the [aftermath of the First World War](#), huge changes occurred in the way people in Britain perceived international issues. An iron resolve had been instilled across the United Kingdom: **'never again'** was not just to be an ideal, but a tangible determination that everyone must actively work towards the preservation of world peace.

It was this desire which quickly led to a heightened interest in international engagement, and ultimately prompted everyday people across Wales to begin to hold '**Daffodil Days**' in aid of the [Welsh League of Nations Union](#). A **uniquely Welsh response**, these events embodied a form of outward looking patriotism – a pride in projecting Wales's international credentials.

In the fifteen years which they occurred, League supporters organised at least one Daffodil Day in over **600 Welsh towns and villages**, transforming the event into a cultural practice which pervaded every corner of the nation, up until the outbreak of World War Two.

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 communities near you. Further info on local activism can be gleaned from Welsh League of Nations Union reports, digitised by [WCIA on People's Collection Wales](#)).

Origins, Development and Successes in the 1920s

The practice of selling daffodils for an international cause began as early as 1922, when volunteers from the [Welsh League of Nations Union](#) took to the streets of Cardiff to raise money to relieve the [famine afflicting great swathes of Russia](#) following the recent civil war.

By 1924, the sale of daffodils throughout the summer to raise money for the work of the WLNU had become a thriving tradition. Daffodil Days would frequently continue to occur until late September (despite the efforts of the executive committee to set a uniform national date in mid-May – tying in to the 'Peace Day' for the newly established [Welsh Youth Message of Peace & Goodwill](#)), and the event quickly cemented itself as an integral part of interwar Welsh culture.



1925 Map of Great Western Railway in Wales, [National Library of Wales Blog](#)

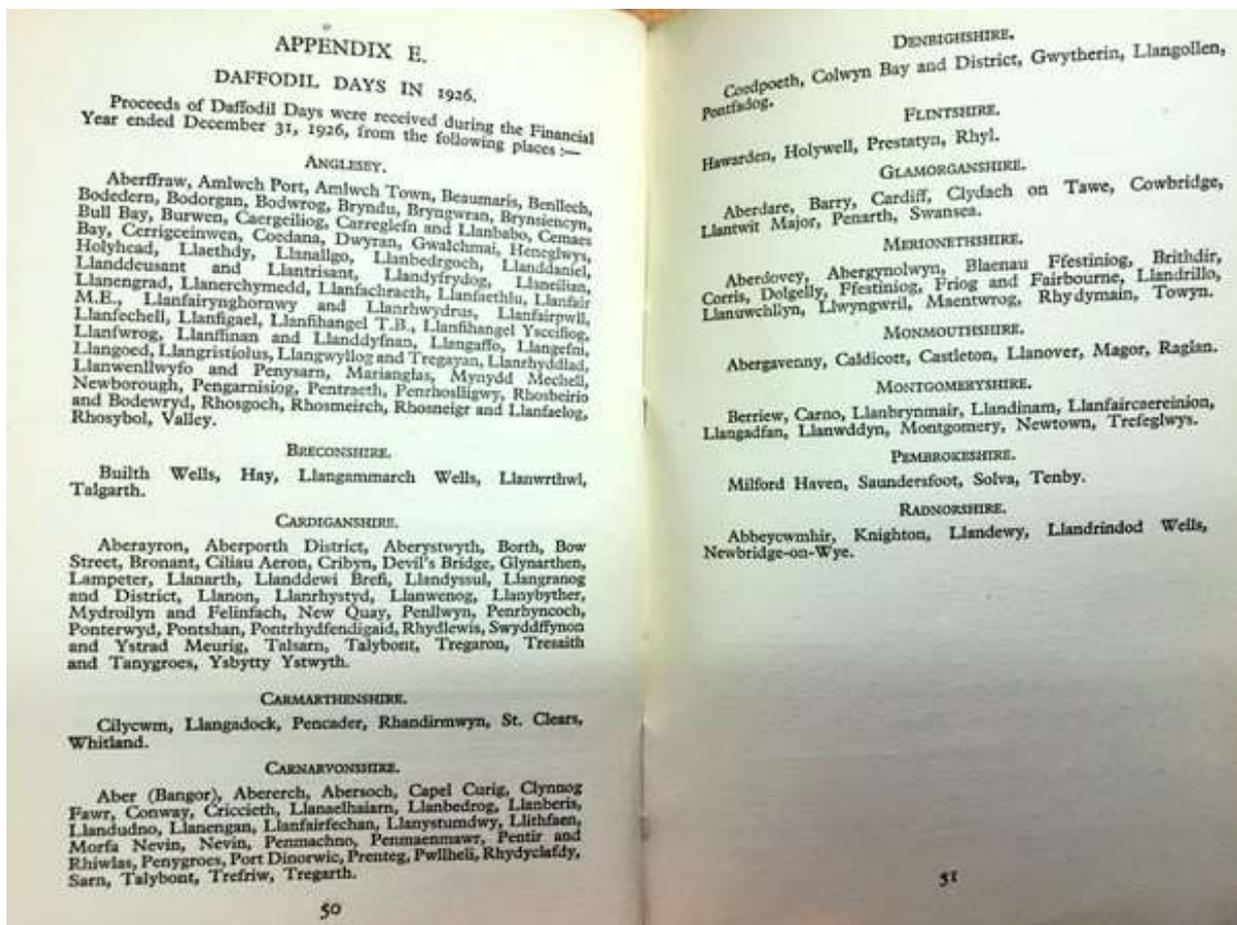
Transported by train across Wales, thousands of boxes of flowers – of both the cardboard and real variety – would arrive in each village in time to be distributed among the local volunteers involved with the Daffodil Day. Equipped with a wicker basket, a wooden tray, or sometimes even a cardboard box donated by a local confectionary shop, helpers would set out from nearby coordination centres, ready to spend their Saturday selling neatly packed daffodils.

School children in particular – despite being officially ‘barred’ from participating! – were a key component of Daffodil Days. Most organisers relished the chance to bolster their numbers with such a surplus of enthusiastic volunteers. Their cause was made clear by the labels across the front of each of their box – **‘for world peace’** – and their dedication plain for all to see by their presence on even the rainiest of weekends during the Welsh summer.

The choice of using a Welsh national symbol to promote an internationalist body was no accident. It conveyed a very deliberate and potent message: a declaration of Wales’ identity as a modern nation, committed, at its very core, to the pursuit of peace and international cooperation. It was a statement of **Welsh public pride in their role at the forefront of internationalism.**

As one newspaper report (1) on the 1925 Cardiff Daffodil Day put it:

“the national flower of Wales had become the international flower of peace. The purchase and wearing of a daffodil in this way expresses both pride in the nation’s past, and hope for its future.”



Communities Wales-wide who organised 'Daffodil Days for Peace' in 1926, from the [Annual Report of the Welsh League of Nations Union](#)

This outward looking patriotism was not confined to major centres such as Cardiff. In 1924 twenty-six Welsh towns held a Daffodil Day in aid of the Welsh League of Nations Union, yet this number had multiplied almost tenfold **by 1927, with 249 Daffodil Days taking place all over Wales.**

In just a few years, Daffodil Days had not only 'blossomed' into a recognised cultural event, but quickly become vital to financing the Welsh League of Nations Union, contributing over half the Council's income for most of the interwar period. In 1927 alone, £1,877 16s 11d worth of daffodils were bought by the people of Wales in aid of the Union – equivalent to around 450,000 cardboard daffodils (2). A particularly impressive figure, given that the population of Wales was recorded to be 2,656,000 at the [last census in 1921](#).

Despite the importance of their work, local Daffodil Days were certainly not the only manifestation of this tradition. Each year the Welsh League of Nations Union would set up a stall selling the flowers at the [National Eisteddfod](#) (3), as well as appearing at other national events such as the [Royal Welsh Agricultural Show](#) right up to 1939.

Rugby matches, furthermore, provided an opportunity for a truly national display of internationalism. This is highlighted in one report of the atmosphere in the national stadium on 9 April 1927 – the day of Wales' first home game since the **Five Nations tournament** earlier that year:

'Maybe it was because of the enthusiasm with which so good a Welsh Nationalist as Mr David Davies, M.P. has espoused the cause of the League of Nations Union – but whatever the cause, Wales has distinguished itself in its enthusiasm for the cause of world

peace. That is why on Saturday in Cardiff everyone wore a daffodil as the insignia of the League of Nations’.

By the late 1920s, Daffodil Days had become a ubiquitous symbol in Welsh society – an established part of interwar culture. They were an emblem of internationalism which, far from conflicting with national identity, had become something to be worn as a display of patriotism – very much at home at a Saturday rugby match.

Women as Peacemakers and Leaders



Annie-Jane Hughes Griffiths, Chair of the Welsh League of Nations Union, holding the [Welsh Women's Peace Memorial](#) outside the White House in Washington, 1924, alongside Mrs Ruth Morgan, Miss Eluned Prys and Mrs. Mary Ellis. TI Ellis Collections, National Library of Wales

As well as their practical and cultural significance, Daffodil Days are also notable for the prominent **role which women played** in their organisation. From the work of [Annie Hughes Griffiths and the success of the women's peace petition to America](#), to the pioneering efforts of [Winifred Coombe Tennant](#) at the [League of Nations Assembly](#), the women of Wales quickly became associated with peace activism. The Daffodil Days were no exception.

Local women often took the **lead in organising events** in their own area, coordinating volunteers and acting as the village representative in correspondence with the Cardiff headquarters. In this role, women would often chair local committees responsible for organising the event, affording them a remarkable level of influence in their local community.

The role of women was certainly not confined to local communities. During the 1920s, Daffodil Days were organised by the **Women's National Daffodil Day Committee**, who were responsible for coordinating local organisers and solving the logistical challenges that came with sending boxes of daffodils to remote communities across Wales.

As time went by, and the contribution of Welsh women to the League of Nations became more formally recognised, the responsibility of Daffodil Days was taken over by the **Women's Advisory Committee**. Founded in 1933, the Women's Advisory Committee to the Welsh League of Nations Union was an official organising body which took over the work of a variety of less formally recognised women's groups, including the National Daffodil Day committee. Under the aegis of Annie Hughes Griffiths, the Daffodil Day

tradition would enjoy some of its most popular years but would also face its most disruptive challenges.

Trials, Resilience and Dogged Optimism in the 1930s



Cardiff Daffodil Day volunteers, pictured in 'Young Workers for Peace', Western Mail, 22 May 1933.

The end of the 'roaring twenties', and the onset of the **Great Depression**, ushered in profound changes to daily life throughout Wales and the world. Disposable incomes dried up as unemployment rose, squeezing the pockets of previously generous League supporters.

The economic downturn was accompanied not only by a noticeable fall in the average income generated by each daffodil day, but also saw a sharp decline in the number of towns which held one at all – particularly in industrial areas of Glamorganshire. The determination of the people of Wales to support the work of the Welsh League of Nations Union, however, remained undiminished. Even amid the economic turmoil engulfing the nation, local branches of the Union were still able to successfully coordinate 211 Daffodil Days across Wales.

In northern areas such as **Anglesey**, the number of daffodil days organised **actually increased in 1930** in an attempt to counteract losses elsewhere, while many countryside towns – for example **Crickhowell** – held their first ever Daffodil Day in this year. Clearly then, the activities of the League were seen as more than simply a charitable cause to be supported in times of affluence. The fact that even in 1930, in the midst of economic crisis, the Welsh League of Nations Union was still able to sell £1707 17s 11d worth of stock –

equivalent to almost 410,000 penny daffodils – is a testament to the commitment of interwar Wales to the internationalism of the League.

Over the next few years the Welsh League of Nations Union found ways to **raise the profile** of the Daffodil Days. In some areas sellers began to dress in the traditional national costumes of League members (4), highlighting the prevalence of grassroots activism in other member nations and providing daffodil wearers with a visual manifestation of the international community they were supporting. In Cardiff, plans were put in place (5) for a **'Field of Hope'** – a field of daffodils planted on the green surrounding the castle – as a symbol of the future to compliment the monument to the past provided by the **'Field of Remembrance'**. As a result, the income from Daffodil Days began to steadily rise.

The Abyssinnia Crisis



Abyssinia Crisis, 1935 – Medical supplies at the front in Addis Ababa. Wikimedia Commons

The optimism inspired by such innovations was, however, badly shaken by the [Abyssinia crisis of 1935](#). The failure of the League to act decisively during the crisis is often considered the beginning of the end for the organisation, resulting in a world-wide crisis of confidence in its authority over a community of nations increasingly turning their attention inwards in pursuit of individual national interest.

As the folders of frantic correspondence between the WLNU and local daffodil day organisers attest, Wales was not impervious to this pattern of disillusionment. Typical of such letters was that sent by the coordinator in **Brynmefonwyd**, who wrote to the Cardiff headquarters in 1936 (6) to inform them that the *'definitely unfavourable' public opinion of the League had forced him to postpone the Daffodil Day that year, as there was a lack of practical interest.* Another organiser from **Llangynwyd** lamented (7) that previously enthusiastic local daffodil sellers now *'absolutely refuse to have anything to do [with] selling for the League which had failed to help when help was needed'*, forcing her to cancel the town's Daffodil Day that year. Even in towns such as **Wrexham**, which did hold a Daffodil Day in 1936, organisers were forced to apologise for the meagre sums they raised (8), as

'the people blame the League for the fate of the Abyssinians'.

The disenchantment of volunteers was not the only repercussion which the Abyssinia Crisis had on the Daffodil Day tradition. In September 1935 the Glamorganshire Chief Constable denied **New Tredegar** a permit to hold a Daffodil Day (9), on the grounds that it could not be considered a 'charitable cause'; a first in the history of the tradition. As an internal Welsh League of Nations Union report noted, there had been 'absolutely no difficulty in obtaining consent' for Daffodil Days until the autumn of 1935, but suddenly the cause was deemed too controversial to raise money for. **Barry, Tonypany, Aberdare**, and others quickly joined the list of towns which were denied permits by local authorities on these grounds (10), as the institution of the League of Nations and the ideal of world peace drifted further apart in the perceptions of ordinary people across Wales.

These problems encountered by Daffodil Day organisers in Wales clearly demonstrate a process of **politicisation of the League issue** taking place in 1935. To be in favour of peaceful international cooperation was no longer, necessarily, synonymous with being in favour of the League of Nations, transforming a once universal cause into a controversial issue.

“The Geneva disappointment”, as one Llandudno organiser termed it, had “shaken confidence in internationalism to its very core.”

**LEAGUE OF NATIONS UNION—
WELSH NATIONAL COUNCIL.**

10, MUSEUM PLACE, CARDIFF.

Will you please organise a
DAFFODIL DAY?

1. The proceeds of Daffodil Days form one of the chief sources of income of the Welsh League of Nations Union, and it is earnestly hoped that in 1937 a Daffodil Day in aid of the Union's funds will be organised in every town and village in Wales and Monmouthshire. The choice of date is left entirely to the locality, but it is suggested that, where no other special date is preferred by the locality, the Daffodil Day should be held on Saturday, May 29th.
2. It is essential that the Local Organiser should apply, at the earliest possible date, for the consent of the local police and, where necessary, of the local authority, and that any regulations of the police or authority be carefully complied with. These regulations, as a rule, exclude persons under a certain age from acting as sellers, and require that sellers shall be in possession of written permits signed by the Local Organiser. In areas which are situated within the boundaries of more than one Police Authority, the consent of each Police Authority is necessary.
3. Supplies for Daffodil Days can be obtained from this Office as follows :
 - (a) Lawn Daffodils for sale at 3d. each (minimum).
Cardboard Daffodils for sale at 1d. each (minimum).
 - (b) Collecting Boxes, where such cannot be procured locally.
 - (c) Cardboard Labels for Trays.
 - (d) Gummed Labels for Collecting Boxes.
 - (e) Blank Permit Forms for sellers.

Lawn Daffodils are packed in boxes of 1 gross—Cardboard Daffodils in packages of 1,000. Smaller quantities can be supplied, if necessary.
4. The Order Form supplied by this office should be returned as early as possible, giving full particulars of the material required.
5. **In all cases, arrangements will have to be made locally for Trays or Baskets.**
6. On receipt of the Order Form at this Office, it will be acknowledged, and supplies will be sent in good time.
7. Two Return Forms will be issued to each local organiser, and it is essential that one of these Return Forms, duly filled in, together with the proceeds, be returned to this Office as soon as possible after the Daffodil Day. *Unused material should be returned separately.*
8. Police Regulations require that no deduction be made from the proceeds, except for the barest essential local expenses. The amount of any such deduction should be clearly shown both on the Return sent to this Office and on that supplied to the Police.
9. Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to, and crossed, "League of Nations Union—Welsh National Council," and forwarded to this Office immediately after the Daffodil Day.

10 MUSEUM PLACE, CARDIFF.
January, 1937.

DAVID SAMWAYS,
General Secretary.

Daffodil Days Appeal Leaflet for 1937, from the Welsh League of Nations Union to local organisers.

Yet, despite all the problems faced by the Welsh League of Nations Union, **1936** turned out to be one of the most successful years for Daffodil Days in the entire interwar period. The [Union's 1936-7 annual report](#) lists over 300 days were held in towns across Wales, while many areas which were unable to hold an official event still managed to raise money through private lobbying of League supporters. '*Llanharan does care*' was the message of one organiser (11) – for while many people in Wales had become disenchanted with the League, there were also many for whom the crisis had only invigorated their desire to see the League succeed: '*it rained almost all the day*' at the **Llanharan** Daffodil Day, but the organiser was still able to proudly report that '*the sellers were splendid to stick it out*'. Letters of encouragement, such as that from **Pencader** (12) signed '*with best wishes for the success of the League*', continued to flood into Cardiff, many containing promises that their next Daffodil Day would be conducted with an even greater vigour in support of the Welsh League of Nations Union.

In 1938, the [opening of Wales Temple of Peace & Health](#) as the new headquarters for the Welsh League of Nations Union and 'spiritual home' for internationalists Wales-wide, offered a much needed moment of celebration, and reflection among challenging times. Over **£12,000 was contributed from public subscriptions** towards the construction of this forward looking monument to the fallen of WW1; and whilst WCIA have not yet found any records on how these subscriptions were gathered, it seems highly likely that Daffodil Days, and the Wales-wide internationalist movement they facilitated, were a huge part of creating this legacy.



On 23 Nov 1938, [Mrs Minnie James from Dowlais turned a symbolic golden key to open the Temple of Peace](#), on behalf of bereaved mothers of Wales and the world. She expressed her hopes that it would continue to inspire future generations to action on peace, and to build a better world as the ultimate 'act of remembrance'.

The Welsh **sentiment of internationalism was still very much in bloom** – determined to weather whatever storms the coming years would bring. The

Welsh League of Nations Union continued to strive for the maintenance of peace right up until the outbreak of WW2 hostilities. Despite the war clouds gathering on the horizon, 206 towns and villages still organised [Daffodil Days in the summer of 1939](#), raising over £820 for the Union in the hope that the fighting could still be prevented.

Yet as peace finally slipped from the grasp of those who strove to maintain it, so the Daffodil Days disappeared into history. Although one isolated event was still held in 1940, the Second World War effectively marked the end of "the Daffodil Day"; the wilting of a Welsh cultural tradition that for 15 years had **bound nationality and internationalism into one electric identity**.

Daffodil Days were a symbol of hope for the future; an affirmation of Wales's place at the forefront of nations striving for conciliation; a statement that its people were amongst the vanguard in the quest for international harmony. Wales was a nation which refused to give up on peace; a heritage to which the story of the Daffodil Days stands as testament.

World Peace Day and Climate Action Today



Wales Climate Strike Sept 2019 outside the Senedd

This weekend, as the world marks the [UN International Day of Peace](#) on Sept 21, WCIA carry forward this flame of internationalist community activism in joining the nationwide #ClimateStrike, in solidarity with #ExtinctionRebellion, [children and Youth groups from all over Wales](#). The current **Climate Crisis** is the cause of our ‘future generations’ no less so than rebuilding world peace was the cause of the post-WW2 ‘**United Nations generation**’ – all of whom grew up with daffodil days as a deep part of Welsh internationalist tradition and identity.

As Wales faces the challenge of shaping its post-Brexit role in the world, among deep community divisions and a changing UK, European and international scene, the for #Peacemakers to champion the needs of future generations – and to learn from and indeed be inspired by our past – remains as great today as ever.

References

[1] 'International Emblem' *Western Mail*, 3 August 1925, 9.

[2] This number is based on the sale of cardboard daffodils at one penny each, however the real figure is likely marginally lower, as a minority of daffodils sold were real flowers, which sold for three pence each.

[3] For correspondence regarding the League's presence at the Eisteddfod see related documents in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Women's National Daffodil day Committee, general correspondence, Feb. – Aug. 1928 [228]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/33.

[4] 'Cardiff and the League of Nations', *Western Mail*, 11 April 1927, 9.

[5] 'Costumes of Many Lands', *Western Mail*, 24 July 1930, 11.

[6] 'League of Nations Union Daffodil Day Suggestion', *Western Mail*, 13 December 1932, 9.

[7] Letter from Beryl M. Griffiths (Brynmafonwyd) to David Samways, 12 May 1936, found in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Daffodil Days-letters, flag days, carnivals, stalls, etc., 1935-9, 1946-7 [88]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/54(1).

[8] Letter from Miss Olwen Evans (Llangynwyd) to David Samways, 8 May 1936, found in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Daffodil Days-letters, flag days, carnivals, stalls, etc., 1935-9, 1946-7 [88]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/54(2).

[9] Letter from Robert Jones (Wrexham) to David Samways, 9 September 1936, found in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Daffodil Days-letters, flag days, carnivals, stalls, etc., 1935-9, 1946-7 [88]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/54(2).

[10] Correspondence with Chief Constable of Glamorganshire, 30 September 1935, found in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Daffodil Days-letters, flag days, carnivals, stalls, etc., 1935-9, 1946-7 [88]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/54(1).

'Glamorgan Daffodil Days' report (1935), found in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Daffodil Days-letters, flag days, carnivals, stalls, etc., 1935-9, 1946-7 [88]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/54(1).

[12] Letter from James Brown (Llanharran) to David Samways, 24 September 1935, found in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Daffodil Days-letters, flag days, carnivals, stalls, etc., 1935-9, 1946-7 [88]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/54(1).

[13] For example, Letter from Bryn Davies (Pencader) to David Samways, 23 June 1936, found in 'League of Nations Union and United Nations Association Records: Daffodil Days-letters, flag days, carnivals, stalls, etc., 1935-9, 1946-7 [88]', Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, B1/54(4).