

LAND OF MY FATHERS
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WELSH NATIONAL EISTEDDFOD

When my father left his native Wales for London for his first post in the medical profession, he left behind him a life so very different from his new one. He must have missed the peaceful quiet of his village which provided his own father with the tranquil environment he needed to write, for his father was a bard and one of Wales best known poets of his day.

To become a bard was, and still is, no mean achievement. A year and a day is given by the National Eisteddfod in which to prepare a lengthy poem written in Welsh in traditional Welsh meter.

The word 'Eisteddfod' is the Welsh word for any kind of sitting or session, but later restricted to a session of the bards, specialists in various art forms who met to discuss their subjects.

The first bardic contests are known to have taken place in the sixth century, but it was not until 1176 that the first competitive Eisteddfod was held in Cardigan. It consisted of two chief competitions, one for poetry, the other music. The prize in each case was a chair.

A more important Eisteddfod was held in 1568 at Caerwys, by command of Queen Elizabeth I. The best poet on this occasion received a silver bardic chair. In addition all claimants to knowledge of artistic subjects had to submit to a qualifying examination in their subject and only successful candidates were given certificates and licenced to earn a living by practising their art. What a gloriously high standard must have prevailed in those days!

The structure of the National Eisteddfod has changed very little through the centuries. It is still held alternately in North and South Wales in August. It remains a mecca of Welsh culture to which Welshmen flock from all over the globe. It carries too, an indescribable magic, a magic that can lure an international celebrity like Sir Geraint Evans back to give his farewell performance here where he began. For it was here in Wales that his rare talent was discovered, a talent that together with his

hard work was to win him a coveted place at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, which became his springboard to fame.

Competitions are held here in poetry, prose, music and drama, all judged by highly qualified adjudicators. The Welsh language is spoken throughout.

The culmination of the National Eisteddfod is when the bard is named. All entries are submitted under a 'nom de plume' and the winner's name is announced in front of a huge audience. It is a most moving and exciting ceremony, as indeed is the spirit of the Eisteddfod. It is hopefully a tradition which will never disappear from what I proudly regard as the 'Land of my Fathers'.

Winifred Swann

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CHRISTIAN AID WEEK 1984

This year during Christian Aid week the house-to-house collections in the Wychwoods amounted to £457. This was in fact £50 more than last year. Very many thanks to all who contributed.

Being able to send this amount of money to Christian Aid Headquarters in order that it may be utilised to causes so desperate that we in our affluent society cannot even begin to imagine is thanks to our collectors. We all lead very busy lives and yet the same willing band of helpers each year are cheerfully agreeable to trudge from house to house on what is often a thankless task. My sincere thanks to them all.

I hope they do realise that without their support and their willingness to sacrifice some of their free time, the wonderful work being achieved by Christian Aid would be adversely affected.

Jackie Findlay
Christian Aid Organiser