

## Petitions Briefing

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 3 Hydref, 2017

Petitions Committee | 3 October 2017

### Research briefing: To recognize the three hundredth anniversary of Williams Pantycelyn

Petition number: P-05-776

Petition title: To recognize the three hundredth anniversary of Williams Pantycelyn

Petition topic: We call on the Welsh Government to recognize and commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of William Williams, Pantycelyn this year (1717–2017). We believe that Williams Pantycelyn has laid the foundations for the modern Wales through all his hymns (over 900), his various literary works (90), and his tireless mission work for the gospel through the whole of Wales for 40 years. The Methodist Reformation of the 18th century, in which Williams played such a key part, led to the establishment of the first national organization in the history of Wales in 400 years, namely the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists (1811). That in turn triggered a series of further educational, social and political reforms which were instrumental in creating the Modern Wales. Pantycelyn therefore is more than just one of the major figures of the faith tradition in Wales. He is one of the major figures of our national story as Welsh people. It is incumbent upon the Welsh Government to recognize his immense contribution to our nation and we call on the Government to arrange an appropriate celebration once the members have returned to Cardiff in September.

**Additional information:**

We note that the Welsh Government has organized similar celebrations to mark the contributions of two other prominent Welshmen recently. Last year, the contribution of the children's novelist Roald Dahl was celebrated, and the previous year, the contribution made by the poet Dylan Thomas. Vast sums of Welsh tax payers' money was spent on these events.

With this precedent having been set twice recently, we believe that it would be inexcusable for our national government to refuse to recognize the contribution of Williams Pantycelyn in the same manner.

With all due respect to Dylan Thomas and Roald Dahl, and their individual contributions in the appropriate fields – their contributions to Welsh life cannot be compared with that of the Sweet Songster, William Williams.

There has been fierce public reaction to the recent fiasco of "The Iron Ring" and the idea of spending £400,000 to celebrate the conquest of Wales by Edward I with a piece of art at Flint Castle. The complaint repeatedly expressed by members of the public was how on earth the Welsh Government could be so ignorant and insensitive in relation to Wales's own history?

The celebration and commemoration of the life and work of Williams Pantycelyn in an appropriate manner would indicate that the Welsh Government is sympathetic to our nation's history.

One idea that we would like you to consider is to transfer the funding allocated to the Iron Ring and erect a majestic piece of art in Llandovery to commemorate the Sweet Songster.

## William Williams Pantycelyn

William Williams was born in Cefn-coed near Pentre-tŷ-gwyn, in the parish of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn, Carmarthenshire, in 1717. Following the death of his father, his mother moved to her old family home, a neighbouring farm called Pantycelyn.

William Williams was converted while listening to the evangelist reformer, Howel Harris, preaching in Talgarth cemetery in 1737, before being ordained as a deacon in 1740, and worked as a curate to Theophilus Evans in Llanwrtyd, Llanfihangel and Llanddewi Abergwesyn until 1743. The Bishop of St David's refused to ordain him as a priest in 1743 because of his Methodist activities, so he decided to become a travelling preacher.

William Williams wrote a number of hymns, and his most popular hymn is Arglwydd, Arwain Trwy'r Anialwch, better known as "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah", translated by Peter Williams in 1771. William Williams was not only a hymn writer, he also wrote poetry and prose.

William Williams died in 1791, and was buried in St Mary's Church, Llanfair-ar-y-bryn.

## Celebrating Dylan Thomas

In 2014, a series of events was organized by the Welsh Government, the Arts Council, Swansea Council and Carmarthenshire County Council, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Dylan Thomas's birth. The events included:

- A literary tour and exhibition at the National Library;
- Stage performance of A Child's Christmas in Wales;
- Production of Under Milk Wood; and
- Five concerts at Bangor University.

According to [news reports in June 2012](#), a total of £750,000 was available from the Welsh Government, the Arts Council, Swansea Council and Carmarthenshire County Council, for those who wanted to organize events to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Dylan Thomas's birth. £500,000 was available for organizing three or four high quality international events, £225,000 for up to 10 medium-sized events, and £25,000 to be shared among small community events.

## Celebrating Roald Dahl

In 2016, a series of events was organized by the Welsh Government, National Theatre Wales, Wales Millennium Centre and Literature Wales, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Roald Dahl. The events included:

- City of the Unexpected – a joint production between National Theatre Wales and the Wales Millennium Centre, which was performed throughout Cardiff, celebrating Roald Dahl's life and work;
- The Land of Song Project; and
- An exhibition of the illustrations of Quentin Blake who was responsible for creating the drawings for several of Roald Dahl's books.

According to a [Freedom of Information request from October 2016](#), the Welsh Government's Major Events Unit supported two events to celebrate the centenary of Roald Dahl, with the government providing £500,000 of grants towards the projects.

## Welsh Government Response

In response to the petition, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates, said that the Welsh Government funds the arts through the Arts Council of Wales, which works within a strategic framework set by the Welsh Government. Its Major Events Unit has funded events and activities, organized by partners, as part of the centenary celebrations of Welsh writers, including Roald Dahl and Dylan Thomas. According to the Cabinet Secretary's letter, both these authors have international profiles and the relevant programmes met specific [criteria](#) set by the Welsh Government.

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure ends the letter by stating:

*Of course, the Major Events Unit would consider proposals from partners or other groups on ways of celebrating other iconic figures, such as William Williams, Pantycelyn - especially during the Year of Legends 2017. However, it should be noted that it has taken several years to complete the arrangements for the Roald Dahl and Dylan Thomas centenary celebrations.*

Every effort is made to ensure that the information in this briefing is correct at the time of its publication. Readers should be aware that these briefing papers are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.