

Welcome to the March issue of the **ForumWales** Newsletter – the bi-monthly newsletter of ‘The Welsh Forum’. The purpose of this newsletter is to bring all members up-to-date with what’s going on at **ForumWales** and also provide you with a small insight into what’s Welsh on the Web.

### The Site

This is the February 2006 newsletter delayed slightly due to ‘other things’.

March the 6<sup>th</sup> saw the anniversary of the launch of **ForumWales**. One year on and things are going well: membership is up, visitor counts are up and the site continues to develop with new features and sections being added.

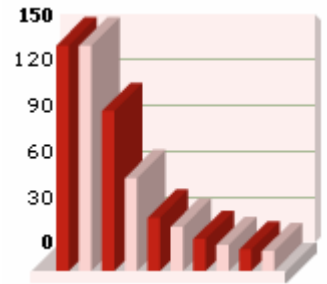
Where has that year gone?! It seems like it was only yesterday that we were welcoming the first few members to the site.

A big thanks to all the members and visitors who have supported us over the past year.

As part of the celebrations, a prize draw was made. The winner, drawn from the hat soon after the official anniversary was **Sionned**. Sionned wins a Skype Mailer pack, a **ForumWales** sticker and a **ForumWales** badge. Not life-changing but it’s the first prize from **ForumWales** and the prizes can only get better from here on! Full details of the Prize Draw and the prize itself can be found in the Forum Announcements section.

A new section added to the site during the first week of March was the Statistics page. Designed to show members and visitors alike a few statistics relating to the ‘hot’ topics and members within the Forum.

Accessible via links from the site Home Page and the Forum Index, the page features seven live graphs. Whenever you view the page, the graphs automatically update with the latest statistics from the Forum. See how you rank on the top posts in the past seven days or of all time; see which topics are the most viewed or the most active.



To view the graphs, you’ll need to have the *Macromedia Flash Player* installed on your computer – this is free to download and is available via the link on the Statistics page.

We hope you find this new addition interesting!

Don’t forget to visit the ForumWales Blog for interesting bits of gossip and news from Wales and beyond. Updated regularly, the Blog lists things of interest, websites to visit and more.

### Words from Arwen

**A**rwen, one of the Forum’s moderators, will occasionally be submitting pieces to the Newsletter.

*This is her first piece, hopefully there will be many more to follow.*

As you know I began to study Irish last summer in an effort to create a bi-lingual genealogy website for County Down, Ireland. After six months of frustration I was forced to admit that I didn't have a flare for this language, and it looked pretty unlikely I was going to learn it easily. Interactive resources are scarce and when living at a distance in an area where lessons are not available, it becomes difficult at best to learn a complex language such as Irish.

Then in January of this year a friend introduced me to Welsh. Like many Americans, I hadn't spent much time studying Wales per se, more as a part of our British history studies. So I wasn't familiar with much of the culture, customs and language of Wales. With the exception of a few occasions, wherein I wondered, as most of us do, how anyone could ever pronounce a bunch of consonants all strung together, I hadn't had much exposure to Welsh. However, that all changed as I began to learn the language and I have to say that in the short time I've been studying Welsh, I've come to feel quite comfortable with it.

Unlike Gaeilge, Welsh is a thriving and growing language. That is not to say that Ireland isn't working to change the status of Gaeilge in every day Ireland. In fact Irish is taught in most schools. There is also a lot of work being done to implement bi-lingual street signs and generally encourage the people of Ireland, especially the younger set, to use their native language. Unfortunately, they are facing something of an uphill struggle. Although many young people are involved with Gaeilge, many more think it a waste of time.

It hasn't been an easy route that's brought Wales to this juncture either. But it has proven a worthwhile pursuit. The Welsh language has not only survived the onslaught of invaders throughout history, but has flourished and grown. Without the enthusiasm and die-hard determination of her people, Wales, I fear, would be in the same boat as Ireland.

Of course the survival of any culture depends upon the enthusiasm of its people and maintaining that enthusiasm down through the generations. Not an easy task in today's world. The Welsh have succeeded in doing this by maintaining traditional celebrations and ceremonies that immerse their children in their native language and heritage. One such celebration is The National Eisteddfod of Wales.

Originally hosted by Lord Rhys in 1176, the Eisteddfod is an annual festival held in North and South Wales. It celebrates the talent of Welsh people and all competitions are held in Welsh. Competitors vie for First, Second or Third place in poetry, music, plays, and other performing arts. The highest honour a young competitor can achieve is to be awarded the chair. Given only to the best poet and musician this traditional award dates back to the first Eisteddfod.

Historically hosted by Welsh nobles, in 1880 an association was formed and the National Eisteddfod became an annual celebration. It is now the largest national festival for drama, arts, literature and music.

In addition to these kinds of celebrations, the Welsh have implemented a completely bi-lingual country. Many labels and menus are available in both languages. Welsh is used in courts and all government forms and information leaflets/booklets and the like are available in Welsh as well as English. Learners' groups such as CYD have been formed to bring learners and native speakers together. Organizations that promote Welsh in different areas have been formed, the Cygor y Celfyddydau (Arts Council), 'Mentrau Iaith', Youth Theatres and Performing Arts Schools, the S4C and Bwrdd yr Iaith (The Welsh Language Board) are among those. Welsh speakers also have a political party representing their interests, Plaid Cymru.

Children are encouraged to learn Welsh and, in some parts of Wales, children are not exposed to English before the age of seven. Until that time Welsh is their only language

both at home and at school. In fact, there are many schools where Welsh is the only language spoken to students. Thus a growing part of the population considers Welsh to be its first language.

But the Welsh have not stopped there. New Welsh language music, including bands and songs appealing to the kids, is released every day. With the help of the Cyngor Lyfrau (Books Council), there are a large number of Welsh publications and books available as well as bi-lingual websites. The BBC has set up an extensive Welsh website, again available in either Welsh or English with a great deal of information and very well-presented learning materials for the learner.

By employing all these methods, the Welsh have brought one of the ancient Celtic languages forward into the modern world. This enthusiasm is snowballing; and the number of speakers, in Wales and around the world, is growing daily.

For my own part, I'm delighted to report that I've found learning Welsh to be a rewarding and satisfying experience; and, much to my surprise, not nearly as difficult as I had expected.

Tan y tro nesaf ....(Until next time...)

*Arwen*

### That's It For Now

If you'd like to contribute to the next issue, please get in touch and we'll see what we can do.



This month's closing image is by [SwanseaRescue](#) and shows the lighthouse at Mumbles, near Swansea.

Visit the [FW Gallery](#) for more photographs from our members.

Until next time!

ForumLead

[ForumLead@ForumWales.com](mailto:ForumLead@ForumWales.com)

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