

Michael Gooderham

I was born and brought up in Suffolk, but my link with Wales was my Welsh mother. Some of my happiest childhood memories are of visits to Bargoed in the Rhymney Valley to visit relations and to explore the local mountains. After studying for a metallurgy degree in London I moved to Sussex and I lived and worked there, and in London, until November 2007 when the opportunity arose for me and my wife to move to Swansea.

My Welsh-speaking grandfather had kindled my interest in the language when I was a teenager in the 1960s. I made various attempts to learn Welsh from books during the decades of living in England, but when I settled in Swansea I became determined to learn it in an organised and practical way. Learning from books is not a good way to become a Welsh speaker. For this reason I enrolled on the Entry Level (Mynediad) Welsh For Adults course at Swansea College. I am now half way through the Foundation (Sylfaen) course.

The way we learn Welsh at the college is not at all like the way I learnt French and German at school. At school the emphasis was on hard work. In the Welsh for Adults course it doesn't feel like work. By using a generous amount of humour and by explaining clearly the structure of the language, our tutor encourages us to mix with the other students and chat with them in Welsh on particular topics. The homework too is not like school homework. True, we have to do exercises, but we're also given the opportunity to express our opinions on various subjects through the use of Welsh. After doing the homework I get the feeling that I have been creative.

There are several reasons why I enjoy learning Welsh and why the Welsh language is playing an increasing role in my life. Firstly, on moving to Wales from South East England I wanted to show everyone my commitment to my new home, and what better way than by learning the language? Also, I felt that by learning Welsh I would gain a deeper insight into Wales as a nation. Over the years I've had the opportunity to travel quite a lot in Europe and this has stimulated my interest in European languages in general, including the Celtic

ones. Reference books on mainland European languages are often written in French, or German, but books on Celtic topics are often in Welsh.

When I was at school I learnt to enjoy reading Chaucer in the original 14th Century English. Thanks to Welsh For Adults, my Welsh has progressed enough for me to start to appreciate the great stories of "The Mabinogion", and the poems of Aneirin and Taliesin, in the original 13-14th Century Welsh. The Welsh language has an amazing history which can be traced right back to the language of the Ancient Britons at the time of the Roman Empire.

I am pleased to report that since I have started to learn the language, I've had conversations in Welsh with people in Carmarthen, Llanelli, Swansea, Maesteg, Bridgend and Cardiff. One of the most satisfying aspects of learning Welsh is that it has brought me into contact with people I would never otherwise have met and I have made new friends in that way. Even people who don't speak Welsh themselves have given me words of encouragement.

If someone from a sleepy country town in East Anglia can grasp the basics of Welsh without having to struggle and worry, it should be even easier for a Welsh person. I speak Welsh with an English accent, but nobody seems to mind.