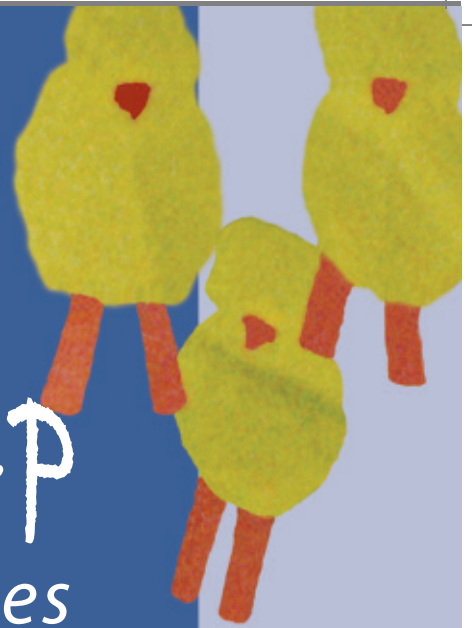


These 'Memories' record the experiences of those involved in the Playgroup Movement in Wales and the effect it had on their lives and on their families.



Memories of the Playgroup Movement in Wales 1961 - 1987

Memories of the Playgroup Movement in Wales



1961-1987

The Playgroup Movement

1961 – 1987

Joan Conway

In the beginning was the LETTER

Whilst the activities of the Women's Liberation movement filled the headlines in the 1960s, a much quieter movement was taking place that would affect the lives of women and their families for decades to come. A letter to 'The Guardian' started it all in 1961. The writer of the letter was Belle Tutaev, a young mother living in London with her four-year old daughter, Anne. Belle was concerned at the lack of nursery provision that was the result of a government embargo imposed in 1960. The embargo had been imposed in order to meet the overwhelming demand for school places for the 'baby boomers', the children born following the Second World War, who were now entering school. School resources were stretched to the limit to cater for the unprecedented influx of children. The lack of accommodation and a shortage of teachers was putting an enormous strain on the



Belle 1966

(Contact 1966)

education system. Emergency Training Colleges provided fast-track training of teachers, mostly ex-service personnel, but the provision of extra classroom facilities took much longer. The solution was to discontinue all provision for the under-fives and use the classroom space for children over five years old. So, at a stroke, resources and provision for the under-fives in the state sector virtually disappeared and parents like Belle Tutaev looked in vain for somewhere to cater for their young toddlers.

Belle started a Campaign for Nursery Education and organised a petition collecting three and a half thousand signatures that she sent to those in authority. She wrote letters to Councillors and knocked on doors pleading for some provision to be made for the under-fives – all to no avail. So, being a trained teacher, she decided to 'do it herself!' She hired a hall, raised funds and opened her own Nursery/Playgroup. It proved such a success that she felt sure others could do as she had done, hence her letter to 'The Guardian' that appeared on 25 August 1961 (see page 2).

What Belle Tutaev did not anticipate was the response her letter would produce. Letters came daily through her letterbox from parents, all asking similar questions – 'How do I start?' 'Where can I buy the equipment?' 'How do I raise funds?' 'What are the regulations?' 'How do I recruit helpers?'. To cope with the volume of enquiries Belle taught herself to type and produced what we might now call a 'newsletter' duplicated on a machine borrowed from her husband. She did this on her kitchen table and sent copies out to all who had written to her. Parents all over the country seized on her advice eagerly and acted upon it. Wherever spare rooms could be found playgroups were opening – in chapel vestries, community halls, scout huts, etc. Conditions were often far from ideal. Funds had to be raised and equipment purchased. Often equipment had to be stored away at the end of each play session and unpacked at the start of the next. Improvisation was called for and incredible commitment was asked of those who

worked in these early playgroups. Belle continued to receive enquiries. The demands on Belle and her helpers were more than could be catered for from Belle's kitchen table. Some kind of structure was needed if those working in the early playgroups were to receive the help they needed.

To cope adequately with all the demands now being made upon Belle Tutaev and her helpers, a small committee was formed and the National Association of Pre-school Playgroups was formally constituted on 10 July 1962 and registered as a charity. The objects of the Association were to encourage the formation of local playgroups, to promote the understanding of the needs of the pre-school child and produce pamphlets and information in relation to this and to hold meetings and conferences to enable those working in playgroups to meet and exchange views and experiences. Playgroups grew rapidly all over the country and those working in them now turned to the new Association for advice and guidance. Belle herself was in great demand. She spoke at countless meetings, responding to invitations from all parts of the country. She wrote articles in numerous journals and continued to respond by letter to the many playgroup people still seeking her help. Belle's primitive newsletter now evolved into a lively monthly magazine called 'CONTACT' and this continued to be the main organ of the Association for many years.

CONTACT proved to be an appropriate name for the Association's magazine as it soon became clear that 'contact' was what playgroup people most wanted – contact with others working in similar circumstances and facing similar problems. The Association recognised this need and encouraged members to form small Branches of the Association in their area in order to hold meetings where members could get together to share their ideas and experiences. In this way members could expand their understanding of the needs of their pre-school children and raise the quality of provision in their playgroups. Soon Branch Volunteers emerged (later called Area Organisers) who understood local needs and had local contacts and were willing to devote time to helping members in numerous ways as well as

organising meetings and workshops in the Branches. Later on Branches came together to form County Associations, which expanded the opportunities for contact still further. As this expansion progressed the movement was developing what was to become its main feature – Parental Involvement.

As parents came together to start playgroups for their children they found that they, too, were gaining from the experience. Like their children, they also were meeting and making friends, often at a time when many were feeling rather isolated coping with young families. Some parents helped actively in the play sessions, learning about the needs of their children, about the value of play and how to provide it. In doing so they often found a new confidence in themselves as parents. Other parents involved themselves more in the management side of the playgroups, working on committees, taking on the responsibility for buying equipment or negotiating with statutory authorities on behalf of the playgroups. Some parents became chairmen, secretaries or treasurers, getting to grips with the complexities of constitutions, agendas, balance sheets, fundraising, insurance and publicity, etc. In doing this many discovered skills they never knew they had. Often skills gained in this way later gave them the incentive to work in other fields of childcare or to embark on further training. The degree of parental involvement inevitably varied greatly from group to group. In



Brenda

(Contact 1977)

some it was minimal, in others it was total. So what had started out as a pressure group for Nursery Education had developed in just five years into a parent-run educational movement in its own right with aims that were much broader than those envisaged by Belle Tutaev.

Moving Forward

The value of the Playgroup Movement was recognised in 1966 when a Government grant was received to pay the salary of a full time National Adviser. Brenda Crowe, a former Nursery School Teacher, NNEB Tutor in Education and remedial teacher with a Child Guidance Clinic, was appointed and her influence on the Playgroup Movement was immense. Her commitment was total and she travelled all over the British Isles meeting people and children, speaking to numerous audiences about the Playgroup Movement and promoting the role of parents. In between her many engagements she found time to write numerous books and articles that became standard references for many playgroup people. One of her books was entitled 'Play is a Feeling' which reflected the importance now being attached to the value of



play in early learning. This topic was now a major focus of most playgroup training courses. One of the first leaflets produced by the Association of Pre-school Playgroups was 'Playing is Learning for Living' which summed up this approach to pre-school education.

In 1967 CONTACT invited members to suggest a design for a logo that would convey without words the two major features of the rapidly developing Movement – the involvement of parents and the importance of play. Ex-art teacher, Jane Trevitt, designed the winning logo in between packing up to move house from Tunbridge Wells to Cambridge. Her logo showed a playleader, children and parents linked together in play and this soon began to appear everywhere – on T shirts, toys and tea-towels; on mugs, pinafores and keys rings and on folders, diaries and paper weights.



Visits to Playgroup by - the Poice

There was hardly a playgroup household in the country that did not have some object in their possession with the playgroup logo on it! Also, in 1967 the name of the Association was changed from 'National Association of Pre-school Playgroups' to 'Pre-school Playgroups Association'.

The abbreviation of this name – PPA – was adopted immediately and appeared everywhere alongside the now familiar logo.

The Seventies

By the Seventies playgroups had become a recognised form of pre-school provision. The Movement had a new confidence and at its Annual General Meeting in 1974 the Aims of the Association were radically revised. The 'involvement of parents' was clearly



Visits to Playgroup by - the Fire Service

specified in these new Aims, as was 'rich and stimulating play provision'. The Aims were very detailed but a shortened summary of them was drafted and this appeared in every copy of CONTACT for many years and in other PPA literature.

This was the summary:

PPA exists to help parents to understand and provide for the needs of their young children. It aims to provide community situations in which parents can, with growing enjoyment and confidence, make the best of their own knowledge and resources in the development of their children.

In the Seventies, training courses of all kinds were developing rapidly. Training was vital if the quality of provision was to be maintained. Courses were being provided for PPA staff at all levels with topics covering every aspect of playgroup work. In 1975 the first full PPA Foundation Course syllabus was designed and many playgroup people followed this and were awarded their PPA Certificates. PPA was now focussing more and more on the whole family and on relations in the community. Mother and toddler groups were emerging (later called Parent and Toddler Groups) to cater for parents with babies or children under playgroup age providing a place for them to meet, if only once weekly. Some mother and toddler groups were organised by playgroups, others were set up independently and PPA supported them all in numerous ways.

PPA was also involved in many other initiatives for the under-fives, with play in hospitals, with playbuses, toy libraries and holiday play schemes. Importantly PPA was also now concerned with children with special needs and how these children could be integrated into playgroups and mother and toddler groups. Families from different ethnic groups also were now seeking places for their children in PPA groups. To cater for the needs of the children, play provision was expanded to include books, games, toys and many other activities that reflected the cultural needs of these families.

Links with schools and colleges were growing and teenagers and students were often regular visitors. So in numerous ways PPA groups were now demonstrating an awareness of the need to reflect the community in which they were set. Children enjoyed visits from familiar people in their area such as the local nurse, policeman or maybe a musician or artist who could share their expertise, knowledge or enthusiasm with the little ones. Visits to places of interest, outside the playgroups, were always popular. A trip to the local fire station, railway station or to a nearby farm provided a new dimension to a playgroup session. All these special events required careful planning and preparation by playgroup staff. Parents frequently helped with this and often provided the additional supervision and assistance that was required. All these new initiatives featured regularly as topics on PPA courses.

Whilst many exciting developments were taking place in playgroups, on a more mundane level groups were still struggling to raise the necessary funding to finance their work. Except for some playgroups which received occasional grants or other support, most continued to be self-supporting. Fundraising was often a major headache and jumble sales, raffles and sponsored events were the order of the day. Many of these efforts peaked during National Playgroup Week, which was by now an annual event. The continued growth of PPA in the Seventies led to two major changes. In 1973 members in Scotland voted to become independent and formed the Scottish Pre-school Playgroups Association (SPPA) adopting their own constitution and managing their own finances. In 1977 Northern Ireland also went independent to become NIPPA.

It would be ten years before Wales would follow suit.

Wales

In Wales the growth of the Playgroup Movement had followed the same pattern as in the rest of Britain. Parents in Wales had also read Belle Tutaev's letter to 'The Guardian' and had responded to it. As elsewhere, playgroups had grown rapidly in the Sixties and had flourished and diversified in the Seventies. Branches were formed and later County Associations. At one period there was also a North Wales Association and a South Wales Association, which enabled members to meet together for talks and discussions. For the time being, however, Wales remained a Region of the National PPA (England & Wales).

In 1973 the Region was boosted by a financial grant from the Welsh Office, which funded the appointment of a National Adviser for Wales, and Myfanwy Edwards was appointed. However, it was under her successor, Marjorie Dykins that Wales really forged ahead. Marjorie took up her appointment as National Adviser with vigour and enthusiasm. Her vitality and strong personality became known throughout Wales. She travelled the length and breadth of the Principality meeting playgroup people, parents and children and creating many useful links with local authorities. As a Welsh speaker she was also able to create a fruitful relationship between PPA and the Welsh Nursery Schools' Movement, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

Marjorie became a key figure in developing a real structure for PPA in Wales. She encouraged the formation of Branches and County Associations and a Wales Regional Council was formed consisting of volunteers from all the Welsh Counties. This became the major decision-making body for PPA in the Wales Region. Later, sub-committees were formed to deal with areas such as training and special needs. Marjorie encouraged the development of training at all levels, working with tutors to design courses appropriate to the needs of their students and she oversaw the setting up of the first Foundation Course in Wales. Whilst all this hard work was taking place to promote playgroups in Wales,

Marjorie and other members of the Regional Council continued to contribute to the National PPA (England & Wales), serving on the National Executive Committee at meetings in London and participating in PPA work nationally.

The Eighties

In 1982 PPA celebrated its 21st birthday at its Annual Conference and Belle Tutaev returned to join in the celebrations. One wonders what her thoughts were as she was greeted by the hundreds of delegates at that Conference. She must have marvelled at what her letter to 'The Guardian' in 1961 had produced. Also in 1982 PPA was honoured when the Princess of Wales agreed to become its Royal Patron.

In June 1984 the Association had been rocked by a financial crisis when it was discovered that a Finance Officer had defrauded PPA out of £60,000. The officer responsible was prosecuted and jailed for two years. However, as he was declared bankrupt the Association's losses were never recovered. PPA pressed on with renewed determination and celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1986.

PPA in Conference

A major event on the PPA calendar was always the Annual General Meeting and Conference which was attended by members from all over the British Isles. The Conference took place over a whole weekend and was located in a different venue each year. Members in the area where the Conference was sited took on the responsibility for the whole event. This was a major task for all those involved. A full programme of events was planned, speakers booked, accommodation found for delegates, exhibitors arranged and Conference booklets designed and printed.

In 1983 the Wales Region of PPA volunteered to host the Conference. This was an ambitious undertaking. A Conference

Committee was set up, chaired by Ivy Webster and this Committee worked very hard for over a year planning all the Conference details, seeking sponsors, booking speakers and exhibitors, etc. The chosen venue for the Conference was Llandudno on the North Wales coast.

The Aberconwy Conference Centre on the promenade was the main focus and gathering point for the delegates. There a fully equipped exhibition hall provided space for nearly fifty commercial exhibitors displaying toys, books and play equipment. These exhibitions were always a magnet at every Conference as delegates arrived with lists and cheque books to buy supplies for their groups. In another area of the Centre PPA stalls from other Regions mounted their displays and other voluntary organisations also had space to promote their work. The Arcadia Theatre adjoining the Conference Centre provided accommodation for talks and lectures, for showing films on playgroup-related topics and for the Gala Concert, which was a high point of the weekend.

A major task for the Wales Conference Committee was to arrange accommodation for delegates. Sixteen seafront hotels were selected and booked. These were all within easy reach of the Conference Centre. In addition, the large Astra Theatre in the centre of town was hired to accommodate the opening ceremony on the Friday evening and the Annual General Meeting on the Saturday.

A number of notable speakers contributed to the Conference over the weekend. The most eminent guest was undoubtedly Professor Jerome Bruner, a distinguished Educational Psychologist who presented the Opening Address. Professor Bruner had been Professor of Psychology at Harvard and later at Oxford. He had led the Oxford Pre-school Research Project into early education and six major books had been published as a result of this Project. Through these and many other works Professor Bruner had made a major contribution in the field of Early Education. His Opening Address provided the Conference with an excellent start.

The weekend that followed went splendidly with the delegates enjoying all the Conference facilities on offer. The Gala Concert on the Saturday evening was provided by the Rhosllanerchrugog Male Voice Choir, a suitable choice for the first Conference to be held in Wales. Many years later Juliet Baxter, who had been the Chairman of the PPA National Executive in 1983, said that the memory of that Choir had remained with her long after she had left by train on the Monday morning to return to London.

The success of the 1983 Conference, which had been attended by 1600 delegates, gave a great boost to the work of PPA in Wales and this undoubtedly provided some of the impetus that led, four years later, to an independent Wales PPA. This was officially inaugurated in Aberystwyth in July 1987. From then on PPA in Wales operated under its own constitution.

The PPA Spirit

Perhaps the main feature that distinguished the Playgroup Movement from other forms of pre-school education was the voluntary nature of the Movement. The vast majority of those working in the organisation were volunteers. There was only a handful of salaried staff. This voluntary aspect led to great flexibility in the way groups operated. Each group, whilst adhering to the statutory requirement laid down by Social Services, had the freedom to plan and operate in ways that met the specific needs of the families for whom they were catering. They were free to decide on hours and days of opening, to recruit staff, fix fees, raise funds, order equipment and, importantly, to plan the play sessions to meet the needs of their children. Involvement of parents was invaluable both on playgroup committees and in the play sessions.

Full parent participation was by no means universal however. In some groups input from parents was limited to contributions to fundraising or by token appearances at committee meetings. In many groups, however, there was an active partnership between

parents and playgroup. Parents wanted to be involved, taking part in the decision-making as well as in the practical day-to-day running of the play sessions. They contributed ideas and a range of expertise, which enriched the work of the groups and the value of playgroup life for their children. The participation of parents in this way had spin-offs, not only for the children and the playgroups but also for the parents themselves. A team spirit was engendered that was unique to PPA. Friendships were formed that sometimes continued long after children and parents had moved on.

21 Years On

This PPA spirit surfaced in April 2004 when twenty former members of Wales PPA met for lunch at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells. This get-together was the idea of Ivy Webster who had chaired the Conference Committee of 1983. She felt it would be fun to hold a reunion for some of those who had been involved in the 1983 Conference, twenty-one years earlier. As these members met, some for the first time in twenty-one years, the old PPA spirit emerged. Memories were revived, anecdotes exchanged and there was much laughter. All agreed that there had been something special about their years in PPA.

Someone said, 'We could write a book!'

So here it is.

How it all Started, Playgroups in the 60s

Leontia Slay

When I first started thinking playgroups in the early 60s, I had no idea that Belle Tutaev had already written the letter that would change the face of Britain.

At that time, 1963, I was living in a new development on the outskirts of Aberystwyth. Most of my neighbours were young families and almost all of them were employed in the University College of Wales or in the neighbouring Agricultural Research Institute.



'Thirsty work'

We wives met in each other's houses for morning coffee and our children played together. We all belonged to the College Women's Club, which held evening lectures and ran summer trips. There were various sub-groups for those of us who wanted to play bridge, or learn how to arrange flowers, or read and discuss books, or fundraise for charities. At one meeting I suggested tentatively that we could run playtime meetings for our children. Other members expressed an interest in this idea and we talked it through. We eventually decided to expand the original idea somewhat, to run play sessions in a hall, to have a 'qualified supervisor' (whatever that might mean) and to offer a welcome to anyone who wished to come, not just fellow members of the College Women's Club.

Matters moved quickly. We found a hall and booked it then and there. There were no regulations that we knew of that had to be consulted. We found a 'qualified supervisor' – she was a qualified teacher who said that she liked small children. We begged and borrowed some toys. We were ready for the off

Someone said to me 'Shouldn't you have a chat with the Local Education Authority about your plans?' I went along to the Office. I was asked, 'What age are these children?' and, on my reply 'Under five years, under school age', I was told, 'Go ahead, it is no concern of ours'.

Someone else said to me 'If you are raising money and charging fees wouldn't it be sensible to open a special bank account, because otherwise the Income Tax people might get onto you?'

Someone else said to me 'Do you think you should have some sort of insurance in case there was an accident to one of the children?' I went along to see the chap who insured our family car. He was a bit surprised, but he arranged a policy. It was rather expensive.

At no time did we even think to look for information or professional support outside of our own resources.

In the spring of 1964, we were ready to start. My small daughter started school and so was denied, forever, the privilege of being a

'playgroup child'. At the very last moment our 'qualified supervisor' moved away as her husband had got a job abroad, we scabbled around and found a replacement supervisor. This one was an experienced infant teacher and, to our utter amazement, she refused to work alone! 'Suppose' she said 'there was an emergency, a fire, a flood or a child hurt, or taken ill, while I was alone in the hall with all those children, what would I be supposed to do? I couldn't go looking for help, or even try to find a phone, because I could not leave the children!'

We reluctantly agreed that she probably knew what she was talking about and decided that we would have to raise the extra money to pay for an assistant.

Our first term was a success, but in the autumn troubles arose. The heating system in the hall was diabolical. It consisted of low-level electric bars. They had to be walled off from the children with a row of chairs. Then they began to give trouble. They fused; burnt out periodically and eventually as the coldest part of the year approached they died totally. We had to move.

After a frantic search and many unsatisfactory conversations with hall owners and hall management committees, we found, we thought, the perfect place. Unfortunately, we had not yet learnt to be properly business-like and when we thought that everything was sorted out about our tenancy we discovered that we were not being offered the use of the big airy room that we expected, but a much smaller, dark rather unsatisfactory room. Once again we started hall hunting.

Eventually we did find a new big hall, which was prepared to offer us houseroom because the owners were trying to re-coup their building costs and there we stayed for many, many years, in fact for the whole duration of the Aberystwyth Playgroup. It was a great venue with loads of space, a number of rooms, a kitchen and a good outdoor play space. From time to time we fell foul of our landlords, the Sea Cadets, as we did not operate to the same standards of Naval discipline that they did. Sand in the wrong place was always a



Myfanwy (Tempest Ltd)

problem – but then isn't it the same for every playgroup?

Looking back, I am amazed that such an amateurish start resulted in a thriving Playgroup committee in Aberystwyth, which grew in the 1960's, 70's and 80's with an increasing number of Playgroups, Mother and Toddler groups, a strong local Branch offering training sessions, and Regional meetings. There was an excellent Area Organiser in post, and a number of our members held important committee positions at Branch,

County, Wales Region and National PPA level.

Like the playgroup movement throughout Britain we 'just grewed'.

Playgroups - What did they do? Who were they for?

Ivy Webster

I arrived in Anglesey in November 1966 with my two-year-old son and six week old daughter who had been born in Cardiff the day Roger started in his new post at Bangor University. I found life difficult for the first few months, being an extremely anxious new mother and also feeling isolated and inadequate.

Then someone said, 'Why don't you join the Playgroup in Menai Bridge?' I had not heard of playgroups. What did they do? Who were they for? I quickly learnt. I went along and was warmly welcomed by Mrs Hubbard, the Playgroup supervisor and by the other mothers. I stayed in the group as long as Matthew needed me and then took my turn on rota. The children and even more myself, gained so much from that Playgroup. I had spent my working life with adults and had no experience of small children until my own arrived. Roger and I thought answers could be found in books, so we read anything relevant – Dr Spock became our authority. But it was from the Playgroup that I learnt so much. The group provided a stimulating range of equipment and activities. I particularly remember one session when all the children were kneading dough, making and cooking rolls, which they proudly brought home. The children loved it there and Catrin who was too young to join was always reluctant to leave and became known as 'Anme', wanting to take part in everything. Her turn came when Matthew went to school and then a few years later Paul joined and also loved it. We did not realise then the wider impact that playgroups would have with their philosophy of

learning through play together with the full involvement of parents.

Organisation of the Menai Bridge Group was informal, being run largely by the supervisor, secretary and treasurer. A more formal structure developed and I found myself chairman. I did not appreciate then that my early involvement with Menai Bridge Playgroup would lead me into a rapidly developing organisation that would be a big part of my life for the next twenty years.

The Menai Bridge Playgroup had early on joined the National Association of Pre-school Playgroups that had been formed in 1961 but we had little contact initially with other groups in our area, which had been developing in similar ways to ours. We started getting together – Benllech, Beaumaris, Holyhead – for informal meetings. Then, inspired by visits from members from Denbighshire and Flintshire, who were far ahead of us, we set up the Anglesey Branch, appointed Veronica Hanson as our Area Organiser and negotiated successfully for a grant from the Local Education Authority. Visits from Brenda Crowe and Maude Henderson, PPA's two National Advisers, helped us to feel that we were part of an increasingly important National Organisation.

With Local Government Reorganisation in 1974 the new County of Gwynedd replaced the old Counties of Anglesey, Caernarvonshire and Merioneth and the former Branches in that area joined to become the Gwynedd County Association.

We were growing and learning a lot from each other. We also met regularly with the Clwyd County Association, formerly Denbigh, Flintshire and Wrexham. North Wales and South Wales Associations were also established and we now had links across Wales. About the same time Wales had its first representative on the National Executive Committee

of PPA in London. This was Marjorie Dykins who was an inspiration to all of us in Wales and through her we learnt a great deal about PPA nationally. We were now also meeting members of staff in the Welsh Office in Cardiff and the Under Secretary of

State for Wales in his office in Whitehall. From my tentative arrival in Menai Bridge Playgroup I, with my colleagues, was now negotiating with Government on behalf of PPA in Wales. The first grant from the Welsh Office was awarded in 1973 and enabled the appointment of our first National Adviser. This was Myfanwy Edwards who had worked in the Social Work section of the Welsh Office. She set up an office in Newport and appointed Yvonne Hern as her Secretary. Myfanwy travelled all over Wales and those playgroups in the more remote parts began to feel that they belonged to a national movement.

Myfanwy retired in 1976 and Marjorie Dykins was then appointed National Adviser. This was a splendid appointment. Marjorie worked tirelessly; she had a wider view than the rest of us of the significance of PPA and its importance in the lives of young children and their families. She was completely committed and without her Wales PPA would not have grown and developed as it did.

By the mid 1970s PPA in Wales was becoming a Regional organisation. Some Regions in England had already set up their own Regional structures and many of us considered that Wales should do the same, especially as Wales had its own source of funding. In 1975 a meeting was held in Llandrindod Wells, attended by members from all over Wales and by the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the NEC. We had thought that at this meeting it would be decided to set up a Wales Region of PPA but some of us, including myself, were persuaded that Wales was not ready – I am very ashamed of myself for this decision. However, the following year, in 1976, the Wales Region was formed and, although not independent, PPA in Wales had much more autonomy; this made a lot of sense as Wales, funded by the Welsh Office, was developing in its own individual way.

A Wales Regional Council, composed of representatives from all the Counties in Wales, was set up and took the major decisions relating to PPA in Wales. Sub-committees had existed prior to this but were now formally established – Finance, Training, Personnel, Special Needs, Legal and Constitutional. The Regional Council met for two days three times a year and a great deal was accomplished. The work on Regional Council was new to us and we were learning all the time, things that seem simple now like drawing up agendas, keeping minutes, making sure that decisions were correctly made and carried out. The Chairmen of the various sub-committees became experts in their different fields. We had had different experiences in our previous working lives and everyone had something to give. Apart from the work of Council we had a great deal of fun and because we stayed overnight for meetings we got to know each other very well and many of us are still friends.

We continued to meet with members of the Welsh Office and our grant was increasing each year. This enabled Development Officers to be appointed for different parts of Wales. There were three part-time Development Officers at first who each covered a large part of Wales but an increased grant enabled us later to appoint eight full-time officers, one for each County in Wales. The office in Newport was retained but we were able to open the Regional Office in Wrexham. An enormous amount had been achieved so that when PPA in Wales decided to become an independent organisation in 1987 a highly sophisticated structure was in place.

My Playgroup Days

Barbara Howell

For ten years playgroups and PPA were a major part of my life. My husband often used to say 'Before we were married, Barbara asked, "You won't be one of those husbands who goes out every night and leaves me baby sitting will you?" – that is because she wanted to go out every night!!' Sometimes it felt like that – with all those meetings. There is a lovely story about meetings in Mold – where we used the Daniel Owen Centre for our meetings. Diane Bellis was an Area Organiser at the time and her playgroup age son asked 'Who is this Daniel Owen?'

My own involvement started when my neighbour and long term friend Ceinwen Jones, tried to get our three year old children into the playgroup that Myra Cuffin ran in her home – the only playgroup in Prestatyn at the time – 1969 – and found that it was oversubscribed. Ceinwen was a trained teacher so, after some thought I asked whether she would be willing to start a new playgroup if I helped her. She agreed and that was the start of my own involvement with the Playgroup Movement. To give us a start, Myra generously allowed us to use her home for three afternoons a week. She also gave us her waiting list. We were off but it was soon clear that we needed more space. We scoured the town and eventually found the Liberal Headquarters in the High Street. There was a panic when the Fire Service said that such a room – over a chip shop – would be a fire risk! The Playgroup fathers came to the rescue and made it acceptably safe. Goodness knows how many children passed through the group over the years.

Myra encouraged us to meet with like-minded people who had started a Flintshire Group – I remember a conference when Marianne Parry from Bristol was the speaker – heady stuff! With the knowledge that Flintshire would soon be part of Clwyd, we had some joint meetings with Denbighshire and met more enthusiasts, particularly Marjorie Dykins, who, even at that early stage, must have had a vision of Wales PPA. First though, there was the task of drawing together the North Wales Groups. Playgroup development was very patchy and many people travelled long journeys. I remember collecting someone from the Conwy Valley and driving to a meeting in Llangedfni. I had my husband's car, which was new. When it was time to come home it was dark and I could not find how to switch on the lights – but we found a policeman in the town and he was delighted to be able to show us where the switch was – we were young then!

Barbara Thomas had been Flintshire's County Organiser and she needed to give up the post. Once again, I said, this time to Cathie Barrett, would she do it if I helped her? We collected six volunteers to be Area Organisers and arranged to share our skills in a training course. Two of those six, Jeanne Cook and Liz Harrison, are still personal friends, thirty years on.

All this was a tremendous learning opportunity, broadened by my attending meetings in London in various capacities, sometimes with Cathie. There was one occasion when Cathie and I were so involved in putting the playgroup world to rights that we forgot to get off the train at Crewe and found ourselves in Warrington. Brenda Crowe and Maude Henderson, our National Advisers, must have had nightmares about our enthusiasm.

PPA was restructured and a series of National Committees formed. I was asked to chair the one about playgroups for children with special needs. John Watson was PPA's Chairman at the time and he used to hold what we might think of as 'cabinet meetings' for the six or so Committee Chairmen – more wonderful learning and a special occasion for me, when some of us went to meet with Dr David Owen,

MP – I cannot remember what his post was but he was in the real Cabinet – and oh we were important!

Myfanwy Edwards was appointed as National Adviser for Wales and then there were posts advertised for part time Development Officers. I was interviewed and offered the North Wales post – a lot to do in three days a week. I feel sure that the places farthest away from Prestatyn must have been short changed but I always remember that whenever I drove over to the west coast, I seemed to be rewarded by good weather.

I retired because my husband needed me in his business, but how I had grown!

Talk about being in the right place at the right time, I feel I was. Women's Lib was happening but there were lots of bright young mothers who were still staying at home with their young children, with lots of home tasks to do but short of stimulation. Many of them had moved area because of their husband's work so there were gaps in their social lives waiting to be filled. I have a lasting impression of great halls full of such young women at PPA Conferences. What a buzz!

If I seem to mention a lot of names it is because people are the first thing I think of at the mention of playgroups but I know that there was a lifelong benefit for my son – and for so many of his generation. I gained in personal skills, confidence, knowledge and understanding – as did so many of my generation.

My First and Lasting Impression of North Wales PPA

Jean Gomersall

My first, and lasting impression of North Wales PPA was that it enabled and supported parents in a very practical way.

When my son was two the Harlech Playgroup was on its way out as our basement meeting place grew mould during its unused summer months. The old primary school was being moved to a brand new location and we were fortunate in persuading the local authorities to section off part of the old school for exclusive Playgroup use – complete with little loos.

For several years the Group was run and staffed only by the parents. As it became more successful a supervisor was employed, but always assisted by parents on a rota basis. It was great to see parents growing in confidence – often reassured by the evidence that their child was not the only ‘terrible two’.

I went to Gwynedd PPA meetings and one day a new Chairman was needed – I ‘only asked a question’ (fatal as we all now know!) and of course became the new Gwynedd PPA Chairman. I was excited and terrified by the new responsibility and promptly rushed out to buy a book on how to chair meetings!

I was fortunate in having a wonderful example to follow. Ivy Webster had been Gwynedd Chairman before me – and became Wales Chairman. She had this knack for discovering which agenda item was the most important; she then quietly sped through the

other items enabling maximum time for everyone to express their opinions on the prime subject.

When the North Wales Association was formed it quickly became a place where like minds could meet and enjoy each other's company (and food). I felt that some members thought it rather indulgent but I personally found it a great help in re-generating enthusiasm.

I'm sure my PPA experience gave me the confidence to start up Guiding in Harlech. My twin daughters were Brownies but there were no Guides to move up to.

Unfortunately, involvement in PPA Wales Region and Guides Cymru overlapped for several years and one day I realised that I was committed to a meeting at Guide HQ in Llandinam – whilst on the same day I was due to chair the PPA Business Committee in Wrexham! Fortunately, one of them cancelled.

Another North Wales Experience

Sheila Griffiths

Living in an area with no small children in the neighbourhood having given up teaching and with two small boys under the age of two years.....

I read in The Guardian one day a letter by Mrs Belle Tutaev about playgroups for pre-school children – had never heard about this movement in North Wales but decided it was just what was needed in our area. Went to see the Health Visitor who operated from the clinic in Mercier House (which had once housed a private school) and asked whether we could start a playgroup in her clinic. Miss Lees was quite interested and said another mother had also mentioned the possibility to her. She said she would be agreeable but only if we established a Mothers' Group first. I then got in touch with Mrs Barbara Thomas (who had trained as a beautician but now had two school-age children; and one daughter coming up to two years of age). I subsequently learnt that Barbara had heard of the Playgroup Movement through a talk Mrs Tutaev had given on the radio. Although Barbara and I never became close friends we found it very easy to work together and straight away established a Mothers' Group and organised speakers for our weekly meetings and got the members enthused about the project of a Playgroup.

We went straight into fundraising mode and I think our first event was a fair in the Church House for which all of the Mothers' Group were given materials and suggestions of what to make with them

to sell at the fair. We also wrote begging letters to local organisations and in a very short time were able to buy enough equipment to open the Playgroup. I think it ran on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 9.30 – midday.

Before we opened we had been in touch with the head office of the Playgroup Association and followed all their guidelines (although this did mean my son could not start as he was not two and a half years old at this time). Parents were expected to join the rota and serve regularly as assistants. Barbara and I both attended all the sessions. Once we were established and running smoothly we advertised for a paid supervisor in the local paper and, after Mrs Cathie Barrett applied for the post, we jointly decided (after interviewing other applicants) that she would be ideal for the job and we never had cause to regret this decision!

Miss Lees' insistence that we start a Mothers' Group before going on to a Playgroup had been an excellent decision as mothers had met and socialised once a week without having small children around so that when the Playgroup opened we were on friendly terms and I know some of the friendships have lasted to this day – nearly forty years later.

Once the Arcville Playgroup was up and running we were asked to open one on the other side of the railway line, this we did in an old school building and we appointed an ex-grammar school teacher as the supervisor – Mrs Grace Owen – who also proved to be the ideal person for the job. Soon after the opening of the Arcville Playgroup the need was felt for a Toddlers' Group so the playgroup mothers hired the local Scout Hut. We raised money for equipment and started the Toddlers' Group, meeting twice a week with all the parents staying with their children.

Soon after this I was enticed back to teaching in an infants' school on a mornings-only basis so my two sons both had to go to a nearby private nursery school – without having the benefit of the playgroup experience! Most of the children I taught came from a council estate and many were lacking in the sort of experiences on which learning is based. I remembered a talk, which an experienced child psychologist had given to the Mothers' Group, when he said that many children who were referred to him could not recognise the picture of a bus as a bus as they were not used to looking at books. I also could see that children who had had nursery school experience were much more easily able to adjust to the demands of school than those who had not had this experience.

I then got in touch with Barbara Phillips and we decided to try a new and experimental playgroup on the council estate for the summer holidays. We decided that the only possible building was the changing room on the estate's playing fields. We then set off to meet the Superintendent of Parks to request his permission. We were both primed with all the arguments to put forward to support a playgroup in the area but we were knocked breathless when he said, 'A great idea – go ahead!' He then told us to go and see the man whose immediate responsibility was the upkeep of the changing rooms but his reaction was quite different, as he thought children should be at home with their mothers! However, he did agree that we could go ahead with the scheme. Towards the end of August when this scheme was coming to a close he was big enough to admit that, since the scheme had been running, vandalism to the changing rooms had become much less of a problem than previously.

Whilst the children were being looked after in the Playgroup their mothers were invited to meet in another changing room and given tea and biscuits whilst they listened to invited speakers – social workers, child psychologists, teachers, further education

lecturers, etc and were given the opportunity to ask questions. These sessions were successful because of the extreme informality of the setting. The mothers also held a successful jumble sale whilst the Playgroup was in session. To fund this Playgroup venture we had been given a one-off donation from the Save the Children Fund and also a grant from the Flintshire Health Committee.

Other fund-raising efforts were a Strawberry Fair and a Coffee Morning opened by Eddie Calvert (The Man with the Golden Trumpet). The opening of a wishing well in the Town Hall entrance raised over £400 for overseas aid for children.

The next playgroup to open was in Prestatyn at the home of Mrs. Myra Cuffin. Later an inaugural meeting of the Flintshire Playgroups Association was held in the Connah's Quay Civic Centre with a speaker from London. Mrs. Cuffin was appointed Press Officer. Other playgroups followed. One was established in Dyserth which was an initiative of Mrs Jean Worthy and a playgroup was opened at Rhuddlan with Mrs. Cathie Barrett in charge.

Some of the benefits of Playgroup were that fathers were involved in making equipment, parents gained experience from committee work. A number of mothers went on to gain professional qualifications.

Early Days at Benllech Playgroup

Freda Kelbrick

In 1968 I moved from Manchester to Benllech on Anglesey with my husband and our little girl Abigail aged two years. I found out there was a lot going on in the village as most of the people (apart from those retired) were, like me, away from the extended family.

I soon made friends when our daughter went to Benllech Playgroup. When I had my second daughter people were happy to take Abigail to Playgroup for me and do my rota duty.

During my time on the committee I started a co-operative buying powder paint amongst other things and selling it by the pound. I had to weigh it out and it would fly everywhere, up my nose and cover my hands. I thank my lucky stars I had a shed to do it in!

I did a few courses with Veronica Hanson and Julia Parry. One in Reading University, which was rather grand and one at Aberystwyth.

Veronica and Julia are the two people I remember most from the early days, they worked so hard to keep the Playgroup going.

We had a great social life through the Playgroup. Fundraising always involved a meal or a dance. People were very generous with time and the dances became very popular. The Glanrafon Hotel kindly let us use their ballroom and let us self cater, which allowed us to make more money. My husband worked at Wylfa along with a lot of other young fathers and people would always ask, 'Are there any dances coming up?' and he would sell tickets to those interested.

My three daughters all enjoyed playgroup. It was, and still is, a wonderful way to meet people and for children to learn social skills.

Life in PPA - Looking Back - Looking Forward

Marjorie Dykins

Read any document from the Welsh Assembly Government, and you will see featured highly themes of public participation and involvement. Parents in schools, patients in hospitals, users of social services, the public and the police, citizens of local authorities, teenagers and the youth services – the list is endless. In PPA, we were lucky enough to do it without having to bother about names for the process which fashioned the lives of our families as our children grew from being under-five to leaving us for their over-five lives in the formal education structure.

I was an older mother, sitting at the breakfast table, and reading 'The Guardian'. The famous Belle Tutaev letter, which started it all in August 1961 was the spur for me to mention the possibility of starting a playgroup in Garden Village, near Wrexham, while at a birthday party in a friend's house nearby. It happened that one of us was a trained Nursery Teacher, so she gave us some professional advice. We called a meeting of all the mums living on one drive. So many came that we had to send out for a supply of picnic chairs. Many still recall the sight of that drive on that summer evening, as the seating was returned home.

Our first task was to find premises. It was not easy. The Community Centre Committee needed persuasion that, if we were to do the job properly, we would need to have sand and water play. Perish the thought that their floor could be used in such a way!! But we persisted, and used some political strategies to help. The father of one of our number was a well-respected Labour Peer

and he opened our first big fundraising effort. No grants were known about, we just had to do it ourselves.

The Playgroup opened in September, with equipment made, donated or borrowed, and the budget set on the basis of the number of children attending. From the beginning we held regular parents' meetings, took part in village events and supported other areas to do their own thing to provide pre-school education for their children.

Soon Wrexham had a Branch of PPA, and it helped form the County (Denbighshire) Branch, with a fair input to bringing Wales PPA into being.

So how was this achieved by groups of mothers in a continually evolving structure to meet the needs of under-fives?

First, it was the age-old commitment of parents to do their very best for their children and to be willing to learn what that best was. We certainly were persuaded that playing was learning, and we knew that all the activities should be arranged to that end. There were no targets for the children to achieve – our target was to get all the mothers to play a part in the Playgroup. We soon realised that the mothers were learning as well, and we arranged training courses, sponsored by the WEA and by enlightened Education Authorities.

Second, it was the realisation that we could only make progress if we worked together. We did not know it, but we were using classic Community Development tactics. So we came to know and learn about other parts of our town, county and country. Wrexham had a very early Hospital Playgroup, laying the foundation for the present welcome to parents in wards. By the way, our meeting to form that Playgroup had as its speaker the Consultant Paediatrician from the Wrexham Maelor Hospital, who gave his unequivocal support to the venture.

Third, we always, but always, sought professional advice. Teachers, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Adult Education Practitioners, Lawyers, Architects, Planners, Uncle Tom Cobley and all were asked for, and readily gave their advice. Some, of course, were parents themselves, but in my experience, none could resist the appeal of earnest volunteers working to enrich the community through the early education of its children.

Fourth, we were willing to travel beyond our areas. Chester, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol and many University Campuses were places where we went to learn the range of skills needed to sustain the efforts which earned PPA a place in the network of services for children.

Fifth, we were supported by our families. Our husbands, partners, parents were wise enough to realise that giving mothers opportunity to be involved in action for their under-fives was a way of nurturing, at the very deepest level, a commitment to responsibility for society as a whole.

And what happened? Well, apart from building a network of pre-school groups throughout Wales, it gave a whole generation of mothers the confidence to support the community in all sorts of ways. There are many who would quote their experience in PPA as the basis of their achievements in many fields.

We were privileged to be part of the Playgroup Movement in Wales and I hope our children will have similar experiences. Come to M & S on a Saturday morning in Wrexham and I guarantee that there will be one conversation between PPA girls (!) talking about – not clothes or the weather or even football – but about their children.

Welcome! Come on in and meet everyone

Jill Burton

As a teacher I suppose it was inevitable that I would become involved with the training aspect of PPA, with the Foundation Course as Tutor and as a member of the Wales Regional Training Committee and later its Chairman.

But it was not always so.

In 1976 I gave up teaching to have my first baby and at the same time my husband moved his job from the Midlands to North Wales. So there I was alone in North Wales, a new house, a new village and a new baby, and very lonely. There was a playgroup in the village but they did not take children below three years of age, which was a long way off in the future.

I was fortunate that I could drive and after many months I saw a notice in another village about Mother & Toddler Groups. By now confidence was at rock bottom and it took three Friday mornings watching mums going in before I could put together enough courage to follow them with my push chair. I was lucky! The group was run by the Vicar's wife who caught sight of me and ran towards me with arms outstretched saying, 'Welcome. Come on in and meet everyone'.

The rest was inevitable and went on stage by stage over the years, making friends, joining the local playgroup and later the playgroup committee, starting a mother & toddler group in my own village, asking PPA for advice on how to do it, going to Branch meetings and committee, working as Area Organiser, the County Association meetings, the Wales Region meetings, the National Conferences, etc, etc, etc.

Each stage was a boost in confidence and in developing and using skills of organisation. So many people found PPA just that, a way of developing confidence in their own child-rearing skills and in their abilities in organisation, financial control, committee procedure, the workings of local government. How many times did we complain that mums on committees and courses resigned to 'move on' but they were using that new found confidence to make new careers and life choices. Many used the enthusiasm they had gained from attending PPA courses to sign up for further education. In my job today I meet hundreds of teachers every year and many times we recognise each other from the old Playgroup days and I hear, 'I went on a playgroup course and thought I would like to carry on and go to college.'

I am grateful for the PPA years and what it gave me and my children but I still remember that I was fortunate in that first welcome, the first step on the ladder and am grateful to the Vicar's wife.

How Time Flies!!

Olive Browne

We came to Wales from Nottingham when my son was six months old and he will be thirty-seven in July 2007!!!

I had previously run a playgroup for my church in Nottingham and when people knew this I was asked to start one in Penarth. This I agreed to do but was unprepared for people asking why I was having fundraising events when the money was going into my pocket. We explained to them that the group was a fundraiser for the church and we were paid very little as it was a charity. PPA was not in vogue here but I am pleased to say it soon was and is flourishing still. My daughter is running a playgroup in Creigiau and following our traditions and recipes but having much more paperwork to do for Social Services. Karen is hoping to hand over her group in July to take up a new career as an NVQ Assessor.

We had great times getting our groups going and gradually building up our ties with PPA and soon Myfanwy Edwards became our National Adviser with an office in Newport and I became one of the early South Wales Association Chairmen. The training courses which we had fun planning and running, soon became a 'must' for all playgroup personnel and have become very professional now. Meetings in Llandrindod Wells and Newtown became part of our lives and, in particular, I recall a winter one in Newtown when the snowy road was closed behind us.

The trip to London to meet Princess Diana, Patron of PPA, was indeed something to remember and how beautiful she looked.

My 'children' are now 45, 41 and 37 years old – how time flies but with eight grandchildren I am kept quite busy.

When sadly my husband died after a long struggle with Alzheimer's

disease, I applied for and was successful in becoming a Carer Member on our Local Health Board, which is keeping me very busy as well.

Olive's elder daughter has recently been appointed by Wales PPA to the post of Training Co-ordinator in Cardiff. Eds

Playgroup? What was that?

June Frost

My family and I arrived in Cardiff in 1969 following a career in Nursery Schools in the public and private sectors. I found a job in an Infant School but did not conform, finding it very formal and 'stuffy'.

A Church friend asked if I would like to help in her Playgroup. Playgroup? What was that? I decided to give it a try and to my surprise I really enjoyed it and soon settled in.

Very shortly afterwards, a person came into Playgroup to invite us to a meeting to try to form the Cardiff Branch of PPA. Another new term to assimilate! Also this person, one Barbara Adam, said she was an Area Organiser?

However, undaunted, two of us decided to go and listen. My friend decided we should join PPA, if only for the insurance, but she did not want to get involved in a Branch. But I was intrigued, and when a meeting was held to formalise the Cardiff Branch, I found myself voted Treasurer (luckily there was no money!) What did I get myself into?

Years of hard work and many miles of travelling followed. I made lots of new friends all over the UK and enjoyed much laughter.

Those train journeys to meetings at Shrewsbury are a tale in themselves – or being snowbound at Preston Montford – I could go on and on

Happy Days!

Memories of Playgroup

Gwyneira James

The other day I met one of my Playgroup children. I remembered him as a lively three year old with a permanent glint of mischief in his eye. Now he towered above me, a senior Army Officer, six foot plus, with his own small girls in tow. We hugged enthusiastically and I reminded myself that the last time that I had held him in my arms it was probably because I was trying to restrain him from making a daredevil leap from the top bar of the climbing frame or from launching himself, head first, through a convenient open window.

The incident started me thinking back to the good old days in the Aberystwyth Playgroup.

How Playgroup Helped my Special Son

June Owens

My first recollection of the PPA was on the 24 June 1981 when I was standing in the room attached to a playroom in the Rhuddlan Children's Centre, Rhuddlan. My son had been diagnosed with developmental delay and we had been sent there for him to be assessed to decide which course of education he was going to take, in other words School.

The first thing which I clearly remember was the very friendly welcome from both parents and staff and looking through the window there were two Playgroup staff singing and dancing and talking to the children. It made me realise that there were a lot of others like my son and there were certainly more like me coming to terms with the situation.

Judith, who was the Playgroup leader, made me feel very much at home and joined us for a drink after the session. I remember feeling this PPA was going to be a great help and a tower of strength to me. The playroom was also fitted out with lots of climbing frames etc. The more I attended the more I realised what great services they provided. We had a Social Worker, Doctor, Speech Therapist, Nurse, Psychologist and Physiotherapist all under one roof which was marvellous.

As time progressed Judith set up a committee to run the parents' group in conjunction with the professionals and we had a wonderful rapport so the Centre was a very happy place I remember mothers coming there to have a break and discuss the future treatments, schooling and their feelings which, of course, I can tell you was very important.

We joined together with the PPA and held numerous fundraising



events, including Bingo. After 25 years I am still in touch with some of the parents and still see the Playgroup Leader occasionally.

Finally, without my being sent to PPA, I would have missed out so much because my son would probably not have come on as much and I would never have been able to cope with the realisation of the extremes of his handicap.

What did PPA do for me (and my family)?

Janet McAllister

Away back in 1974 I arrived in Cwmbran Gwent, with my husband Richard, as a young (well fairly young) mother of two daughters, then aged 4 years and 2 years. Jennifer had been in playgroup in Cornwall. All that I had been required to do was to take her to and from playgroup. I thought that was the way things were! I had never heard of Mother and Toddler Groups, so Rachel had had no experience of socialising, other than with close friends and their children.

How wrong I was! Now over thirty years later I am sitting at my computer and reflecting on how moving to South Wales and becoming involved in PPA helped me.

Of course, over the years the chronology may have become a bit blurred but this is briefly what evolved. I suspect that there are many others with similar tales to tell. This is my story!

In 1974 playgroups largely relied on a Mothers' Rota for assistance. This was in the days before it was the norm for mothers to go out to work. It was probably on my first experience of the Rota that the Chairman of the Playgroup (another Mum) asked me if I would be willing to become a member of the Committee, which was responsible for running the Playgroup. 'It will not involve much' was what she told me! Well, within six months, I am not quite sure how it happened, I was Chairman of the Committee.

I met Marjorie Morris, the then local Development Officer. She told me about a new Mother and Toddler Group that had been set up locally – these were a new phenomenon in those days. Soon Marjorie was back telling me that a Mother and Toddler Working



Party was being set up by PPA in London and would I be willing to become a member of that Group. I did. That was certainly the take off point. Looking back I think that I must have been very easy to persuade, but certainly doing the best for my children was a consideration. 'Learning through play' became my mantra.

Over the next decade or so and beyond the independence of Wales PPA in 1987 I stayed involved in various guises. Here is a brief run down of that involvement. Member of Cwmbran Nursery Playgroups Committee, Gwent PPA Chairman, member of the South Wales Association of PPA (I have a vague recollection of being Treasurer of this, but I may be wrong), member of the National PPA Executive Committee for three years and one time Vice Chairman of that Committee, member of Wales PPA Regional Council, member of the Group which organised the National PPA AGM in Llandudno in 1983 and member of the Resource Centre (in Newport) Management Committee. All these roles were in a voluntary capacity and there are probably others that have been lost in the mists of time. Finally, in 1985 I became Development Officer for Gwent – a paid post – where I stayed until 1988.

My children were now at or nearing school leaving age, the number of meetings that one had to attend was increasing and more and more of these were outside Gwent. The vast number of meetings was perhaps the one downside of life with PPA and I needed a new challenge – it was time to move on to other things, but it was the confidence that I had gained during the past fourteen years or so that enabled me to do so. The experiences that had taught me how to fill in an application form, how to approach interviews, how to communicate with other people, how to speak in public, how to take minutes, etc, etc now helped me to gain the post of Clerk to Croesyceiliog and Llanyrafon Community Council in Gwent. Here the skills I had learnt were to prove invaluable.

Not only did PPA help me, it helped my family. The help and support of Richard was vital. He became more and more proficient in looking after the children, although we had to be careful that the scales did not swing too far in his direction as that would have been unfair to someone who had a very responsible full time job. On one occasion in 1982, famous in the folklore of Wales PPA, he had



to look after the girls for four days when I became marooned with others in a snowdrift (well almost) at Preston Montford Field Centre, near Shrewsbury.

Jennifer and Rachel, as young children, benefited from the ethos of 'learning through play'. Now Rachel and her husband have twins, just a year old. The wheel has turned full circle and Rachel attends a Mother and Toddler Group with James and Kathryn.

Now in 2006 I am no longer Clerk to the Community Council. I have retired, now being beyond retiring age and drawing my pension! However, I now take the Minutes for the Executive Committee of the Gwent Family History Society. So thirty years on from my first involvement with PPA I can say, 'Thank you PPA'. Without that experience I am sure that I would not be the person that I am today nor, I think, would my family be the people that they are.

How Did I get Involved?

Veronica Hanson

Sometime towards the end of 1964, Diana North rang me (she had my name from the Health Visitor) and invited me to a meeting at Mari Wyn Meredith's house. This meeting was called because some of the local children had applied to join the newly formed Ysgol Feithrin but had been refused because they were not Welsh speaking. Ysgol Feithrin Committee members were very supportive to us starting up a playgroup for English speaking children and to the idea that the Welsh language could be introduced to those children but they were not allowed, at that time, to do this themselves.

All the usual things happened. A committee was formed, premises found (shared premises with the Ysgol Feithrin, separate equipment), approval gained from Social Services and the group opened at the beginning of January 1965. I started off as a helper at the group but became leader soon after. The leader was Diana Manley but she resigned soon after we started. My son Christopher, who was almost four when the group opened, attended the group until he went to school in September 1965. My other son, Justin was born in 1966. I worked at the group until the end of the July summer term. Justin was born in August and unofficially came with me from October 1966 until he went to school in 1971. (My granddaughter, Lara, Justin's younger daughter, started at Benllech Playgroup in 2005 – forty years since the group opened).

I leaned heavily on publications from the New Zealand Playgroups Association at the start. I am not sure how I got hold of them. The ideas seemed good to me, free play, creativity and parents being involved. We introduced painting, percussion, lots of sticking, finger painting, sponge painting, dressing up, house play, water play, sand, story telling – all based on stuff I learnt from New Zealand. At this

stage we did not have contact with any other playgroups or branches. I did join PPA and received CONTACT which kept me abreast of things and helped me keep my faith in free play, creativity and parents being involved. In those days CONTACT was all black and white and was produced by Copyprint in Borough High Street.

We did have a complaint from one mother that we were not teaching the children to read – but we stuck to our guns.

After a while we moved from our original shared premises at the Goronwy Owen Hall to the Church Hall in Benllech.

After Christopher went to school in September 1965 I carried on at the Playgroup until the end of the summer term before Justin appeared and then took time off until the October half term. Justin came with me, in his carrycot, as a toddler, and at 'real' Playgroup age. Once he went to school we started a Mother and Toddler Group. Julia was helping me by now. In the early days everyone helping at



Teddy's Incredible Journey

Playgroup had to have a chest x-ray. Once it was announced that the free x-ray mobile service was ending we started to worry about the cost of this and hired a bus to take Playgroup people to Llanferres

near Mold – the mobile x-ray van's last stand. Slightly different focus for an outing.

After we had been running the Playgroup for some time, we received prods from people in the neighbouring County 'Why don't you form a Branch?'. Uh – What's a Branch? Why? 'They' suggested we contacted all the groups and invited them to a meeting at the Teachers' Centre in Llangefni. We did this and made acquaintance for the first time with Cathie Barrett, Barbara Howells, Barbara Thomas and Marjorie Dykins. I think we were a bit scared of all of them – they seemed to know such a lot and talked about things we had not thought of as we went about our daily business of running Playgroups. However, after some discussion, we decided to have this 'Branch'. Ivy became Chairman, Marilyn Runham, Eunice Lorenz, Barbara Gibbons and Diana Thomas were all very much involved. We organised meetings, invited speakers, set up a training course. After a while we began to hear things about 'Foundation Courses'. I nearly went on one at Kelsterton but the practical arrangements in arranging for small children to be cared for proved too much. Eventually we had our own Foundation Course, with Julia as Tutor.

Gradually PPA became known. We were invited to local teacher training courses. We were allowed to use the Teachers' Centre for our meetings and courses. We were asked to run a crèche at the National Eisteddfod in Bangor in 1968 (?). We met with Directors of Education and of Social Services to talk about Playgroups. We started going to the PPA AGM. (Eventually, of course, we organised it ourselves – but that's another story).

After a while I became Area Organiser – looking after the Branch and the Playgroups on Anglesey, visiting them, responding to their queries, etc.

In 1976 I went back to college to do the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. This meant giving up as Area Organiser. When I had finished the year's study PPA was advertising for a Development Officer for our area. I applied for this job and to my surprise got it. A whole new era of PPA involvement started for me.

My memories from now on are a bit blurred. I think perhaps it was all too busy to remain clearly in my mind. I changed from working mostly with Playgroups on Anglesey to working with Branches and the County Association. County Chairman was Jean Gomersall.

We got involved with the legislation to encourage everyone with a disability to be integrated into the community rather than segregated into special schools. This involved a lot of meetings and visits to playgroups who were thinking about accepting a child with special needs, discussing provision, training, being present when NHS personnel visited to assess the viability of the idea.



Photo HTC

Students in Playgroup

As Development Officer I accompanied the Gwynedd representatives on the Wales Regional Council to Regional meetings. Early meetings were held at Llandrindod at the Metropole. Day meetings often took place in Shrewsbury. Pencerrig Country House Hotel near Builth was a popular venue. Julia, Anne Allan and I had a memorable journey back from there one evening in March, which I think was pre-Wales PPA though it is hard to remember dates. We endured one diversion en route – we were sent over a bridge with the water running OVER the bridge so fast that I really thought my car would be swept away. Then from Beddgelert on we encountered more and more water on the roads. We stopped to help one driver whose engine had failed in a flood on the other side of the road. With the help of my Damp Start he got going and ploughed on until we got to Rhyd Ddu.

Water was running from the whole mountainside rather like lava pouring from a volcano. Moving forward cautiously we came upon a Mini absolutely stuck with water pouring over its bonnet. We could not go past it. I tried to get out of the car to assess the situation but the water was over my wellies. The only thing to do was to try to go back, in reverse. I don't think this manoeuvre should have been successful but luckily it was. We tried the pub for shelter but having waded through deep water we were too wet to be welcomed. We then knocked at the door of T H Parry Williams' house, currently being used as an outdoor pursuits centre and occupied that weekend by Aberconwy School. The teachers are at the pub we were told. OK. We set off back towards the pub but met the returning teachers who welcomed us, gave us beds and blankets and red-hot tomato soup, which were very welcome. Julia slept. Anne and I listened to the weather. We realised the rain had stopped but did not know till daylight that it had changed to snow and the countryside was totally white. However, the roads were too wet for it to stick and we made our way home a different way, avoiding the major floods.

For a couple of years we enjoyed a PPA Camp at Bala. The first year

I think was for Gwynedd members. The following year we opened it up to anyone who wanted to join us. I cannot even remember the dates. I can remember families and dogs, children and parents having a go in canoes and barbecues. Celia lost her little boy at 5.00 am – we all panicked at the proximity of the lake but he was found fast asleep at the bottom of Celia's sleeping bag. Lilian and husband came with a three-piece suite to fit into their tent. Other campers were Marjorie, Stella, Barbara Howells, Julia, Celia, Martin Riley and daughter.

If someone jogs my memory I will remember even more.

And So Began the Rest of my Life

Jane Drabble

One could say that most of my adult life has either been shaped around or shaped by the Playgroup Movement. I had always worked with the under 5's as a volunteer in a residential children's home in both the statutory and voluntary sectors before I moved to Anglesey in 1970. In February 1971 a small group of 'Young Wives' knocked at my door and asked me to start up a second Playgroup in Holyhead. They had already successfully started a Playgroup in the Morawelan area and now a couple or so years later were anxious to provide a facility in Llaingoch. Reluctantly I declined as I was pregnant and felt it improper to take on a commitment which I would be unable to see through.

However, in the Autumn term of 1974 I took my son to this very same Playgroup which was a member of the Pre-school Playgroups Association. At this time Wales had not yet become a Region of PPA in its own right. And so began the rest of my life. Little did I know how this experience which essentially I thought, was for my children, would change my life for the next 33 years.

I soon became very involved in Llaingoch Playgroup as a mother and began attending conferences in Bangor University, organised by the Gwynedd County Committee, which featured such eminent names in the Playgroup Movement as Brenda Crowe and Willem Van Der Eyken. I was hooked!

I began attending 'Open Branch' meetings organised by the Anglesey committee and met such unforgettable personalities as Barbara (Barge) Gibbons, Ivy Webster, Marjorie Dykins and

The list could fill the rest of this article. There was obviously no escape from this highly motivated and committed group of people whose enthusiasm was infectious and addictive and I knew this was where I belonged.

I went on to spend many happy but exhausting years as cover for playgroup staff and finally as the Llaingoch Playgroup Supervisor in 1977 where I remained for 14 years.



PPA camp at Bala

We went through the highs and lows of running a playgroup much as today. Very low wages, always fund-raising and scratching around to pay for new equipment and wages, long hours the majority of which were done on a voluntary basis, but the rewards were fantastic. Eager faces of children bursting with an enthusiasm to participate in anything and everything one provided during the hectic morning sessions. Like many groups we went through the anxiety of being turned out of our 'home' in Bethphage Chapel and as we all know finding premises is one of the hardest things to do. But we found a home in a condemned building in the grounds of the comprehensive school which was fine for a good number of years and we established a really productive liaison with the school. We had always been used for school placements but this relationship really flourished with the help of the teacher responsible for pastoral care in the school. This was another era in the life of the Playgroup. Our Playgroup may now have changed its name and lost its original identity but in my mind it will always remain Llaingoch Playgroup.

As a member of the Anglesey committee and a playgroup supervisor in 1986 when the Wales Region of PPA celebrated its 10th birthday, I helped to organise an event in the park at Holyhead. Several Playgroups from the surrounding area converged to celebrate the beginning of 'Teddy's Incredible Journey'. We cheered him off in a royal blue camper van, owned by the Area Organiser at that time, which was bedecked with royal blue balloons and from whence he continued his journey and travelled on a Squadron 22 helicopter from RAF Valley to a Teddybears' Picnic on Benllech beach. Crossed the Menai Straits on the Blue Peter lifeboat and went on to experience many other equally exciting adventures on his journey to Cardiff. Back at the park we continued to celebrate and play games. I can safely say I don't think I have ever been in such a huge circle of children and parents singing 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush' and numerous other songs,

to a bemused audience of passers-by, either before or after that memorable event. We certainly knew how to celebrate being a part of this influential movement of like-minded people

I was also an active member of Anglesey Branch Committee, Anglesey representative on the Gwynedd County Committee, Area Organiser and then aspiring to become Gwynedd representative to Wales National Council

I loved my time with the children and made many friends both with the people who worked with me and the parents who brought their children to the group. I continue to have offers of accommodation and invitations to go back to stay on Anglesey from the people I forged friendships with all those years ago.

I can truly say that when my son joined the Playgroup I had no idea what I was letting myself in for but I wouldn't have missed all the opportunities and experiences I have been involved in over the intervening years. It is true to say I have grown old, fat and grey with Wales PPA!

Students in Playgroups

Reprinted from PPA in Wales Newsletter, Issue 1 1976

Angela Wilkinson, Area Organiser, North Caernarvonshire

Playgroups have become recently in demand as placements for students. As Area Organiser in Caernarvonshire, I have received both glowing reports and complaints concerning students. Where there is good liaison between Playgroup and School, Technical College and Training College, difficulties can soon be ironed out, eg ensuring twelve students do not arrive at one session **or** finding other employment for a disinterested student who spends the whole session closeted in the kitchen with her transistor.

A playgroup in Llandudno has built a good relationship with the local Comprehensive School who send along two boys to assist. These boys gain as much from play as the children and have made and repaired equipment.

In 1974 Caernarvonshire Branch received a request from St Mary's Training College, Bangor to take thirty first year students. Students were accommodated in various playgroups within travelling distance but students could not be easily guided and supervised by their tutors. This year the Branch received from St Mary's what was at first thought to be a daunting task; a request to provide a playgroup that could physically, and willingly accommodate thirty technicians and video recording equipment.

A playgroup in a large Church Hall in Deganwy was found and the Supervisor was talked into agreeing. She waited with trepidation the first visits in mid January. The student group arrived after the playgroup session had begun, entered through the back door and squashed themselves into an ante-room off the stage. The technicians set up two cameras on stage linked to the television in the ante-room. With little disruption to the playgroup, filming began.

One or two children watched and questioned while the cameras were set up but after that first week they were accepted as part of the scenery.

Three students worked in the playgroup session with the children and as the weeks progressed the Tutor was able to point out the various stages of child development. The camera gave the larger group of students an observation of the whole group and then was able to zoom in on an individual child or group or incident, eg the students were able to see a child starting playgroup for the first time and then the gradual process of the child's first separation from mother.

Different aspects of play were concentrated on each week and the playgroup arranged for the junk table or the Wendy House to be within easy range of the cameras. One week the students brought along clay and a circular clay table which was so popular that the



Photo HTC

playgroup was allowed to have the loan of it for the whole year.

Supervisors and Assistants were invited to St Mary's College at the end of the term to see the edited tapes and there was a fruitful interchange of discussion and ideas.

Both the playgroup involved and the students and staff of the College considered the project successful. As a result of the good relationship set up between Playgroups and College, the College offered their premises for the Gwynedd Conference in November 1975.



'The shortest sponsored walk on record' Oakenholt Playgroup near Flint

The Chronicle

Living with Playgroups

Angela Wilkinson

Nostalgia, for those of us of a mature age, is something in which we inevitably indulge. Happy memories of a time in our family history, when we were 'just mums', come flooding back. This was a period of our lives when we did not have time to reflect or assess, we were too busy bringing up, in our case, four children and of course being involved in playgroups.

For sixteen years, playgroups became an integral part of our family living in Deganwy, Gwynedd (now Conwy). It all began when our first child, Andrew, was invited to join a playschool in the Village Church Hall (now demolished) in 1968. It was an opportunity for my son to play with other children and for myself, a mum with a toddler and a baby, to meet and socialise with other mums. Previously the highlight of the week was to visit the baby clinic.

Two years later, I became Supervisor of the Deganwy Playgroup and joined the Pre-school Playgroups Association. Our second child, Paula, joined me at the playgroup. Although trained as a secondary school teacher, it was not until I gained the experience of working in a playgroup and joined PPA that I understood fully the meaning and importance of play to a child's development. Literature was available on every aspect of running a playgroup offering so much practical help and suggesting new ideas. In 1971, membership of PPA was £2.50 and the invaluable Playgroup News/Contact was £1.30.

I gave up the Playgroup Supervisor's job just before the birth of my third child, James, in 1972. After a couple of years being just a mum, I became involved with playgroups again as an Area Organiser. This voluntary role, with travel expenses, meant I could

take my son with me to visit groups or local meetings, during school hours. He became quite an expert on playgroups, preferring those with the most welcoming atmosphere and good facilities.

It was never too difficult to convince parents and supervisors of the importance of providing a good variety of play for pre-school children. It was not always easy to convince established organisations or groups to give all children, especially those who were disabled, the opportunity given to other children, to play with paint, sand, collage and books eg comment made 'We do not give them books, they would tear them'. This negative attitude made it clear to me how important it was to spread the message of 'learning through play'.

What other organisation provided a situation for children to learn through play, socialise, have fun with parent participation and, at the same time, provide a learning environment for parents?

In the next few years, I learnt how to organise fundraising events, support playgroups and parents, help arrange parent courses and liaise with Local Authorities. I travelled to Conferences in Exeter, Newcastle, Brighton, Edinburgh and London. I remember taking turns to carry a baby in a papoose around the centre of London for another Mum, and returning from Edinburgh driven by Cathie in the snow, the road being closed behind us. We were dedicated!

My teacher training at Secondary level proved useful when we co-operated with a local Secondary School in preparing some older pupils to take part in work experience in playgroups. The teenagers, under our supervision, prepared all the playgroup activities, painting, dough, collage, water play etc. They took part themselves in these activities. Two teenage boys asked to take home the dough and their collages made from natural materials eg leaves, shells etc. Pre-school younger relatives or friends were invited into the school playgroup the next day. The young people enjoyed it as much as the pre-school group. The Head teacher of

the school, calling in later to see if all was well, was amazed to see a boy, who had experienced many difficulties in school, working so hard to clear up the devastation left by the water play.

In 1976, my fourth child, David, was born and I gave up working as Area Organiser but remained on the Caernarvonshire PPA Committee.

The co-operation and talents of the whole family were needed to support the growth of the Playgroup Movement. Without the support of husbands, taking over childminding duties on away weekends or meetings, we could not have done any of this. As our own children grew up they too became involved.

Family weekend camps at Bala Lake were an opportunity for all the family to play together. Mums, Dads and older children helped one another to put up tents (some camping for the first time), raise the home-made PPA camp flag, organise games, eg welly throwing, supervise canoeing on the lake and a barbecue. It was great fun, play for all. One incident did cause some concern. Early one morning, all were awakened to search for a toddler from the group who had gone missing. There was great panic, we were so close to the lake. He was found safely tucked up at the bottom of his sleeping bag, still breathing!

It is amazing how the Playgroup Movement, especially in Wales, encouraged the use of all one's talents, even those we did not know we had, such as organising a National PPA Annual General Meeting and Conference for over 1600 members in Llandudno.

The memories of the Conference, organised by Wales are many. The skills and companionship of the Conference Team, chaired by Ivy Webster, supported us through two years of preparation. We could have given every hotel along Llandudno Promenade a star rating, we checked them all out making detailed records of their facilities. Each venue for a Meeting, Conference, AGM Exhibition was approved, everything was done to provide comfort for all the delegates. Each Branch/County provided a hostess for each hotel.

Creative talents were used to provide a Welsh flavour to the Conference. Conference booklets and mugs were designed, sporting a Welsh Dragon and the words Wales PPA *Cymru*. Some of our members and children wore Welsh Costume, the Welsh National Anthem was printed in the Conference Newsletter. Entertainment was provided by a Welsh Harpist and a wonderful Welsh Male Voice Choir. The 1600 delegates from all regions of England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and even from Germany were given a truly Welsh *Croeso*.

My family helped make a PPA flag which flew proudly outside the Conference Exhibition Centre. My teenage daughter's memory was of preparing and helping with the crèche, making dough, etc for visiting children in the Exhibition Centre.

Memories of PPA still abound in my home, PPA mugs, bag, apron, kit, flag, lest I forget. Playgroups in North Wales have been a wonderful learning curve for my whole family and now we can put into practice all that we have learned and experienced with our five grandchildren.

Mother and Toddler Groups

Julia Parry

My first involvement with a Mother and Toddler Group was in 1973 when I helped to set up a group in Benllech, Anglesey. The group was part of a Pre-school Playgroup. They met on a Monday afternoon at the Church Room for a two-hour session. As the children approached the age of three they were integrated into the Playgroup, which made the transition much easier for them.

Everyone enjoyed relaxing with their own and other people's children in the warm, happy atmosphere. There was lots to do – chairs, rugs, cushions, toys, books to be set out, Mums to welcome, tea to be made and outings to be discussed.

As there were a lot of Mums new to the village this was a great place to make new friends, share experiences and problems while the children watched and played alongside the other children and adults, exploring the various toys and activities, happy knowing that Mum was nearby. Helping the group to grow was really exciting.

The adults remained responsible for the children they had brought. A small charge was made to cover the cost of running the group. Fees were collected each week to cover refreshments, toilet rolls, tissues, rent, heating, etc and extra money was raised by fundraising with the Playgroup. The group was covered by the PPA Playgroup Insurance and PPA Membership. Mums from the group were also on the Playgroup Committee.

The group shared suitable equipment with the Playgroup, they borrowed other toys and jigsaws from the Anglesey PPA Branch Jigsaw and Toy Library. Other items such as paint and paper were obtained from the Anglesey PPA Branch Bulk Buy Scheme and books were obtained from the Library van, which called once a term.

In 1973 Mother and Toddler groups were few and far between but as people began to realise their tremendous value as a community facility there was a great increase all over the country.

In 1977 I attended a Conference at the Canton Hall, London – *Focus on the Under Threes* – with other members from Wales. The Conference related to the great increase in Mother-Toddler Groups. The speaker was Dr Penelope Leach, an acknowledged expert on this particular age group. I was particularly impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment so many people had for the under threes. I came away feeling very inspired and with much food for thought.

Back in 1972 National PPA had carried out a survey about the work of Area Organisers and there was not one mention of work with Mother-Toddler Groups, but some eight years on a further survey was done and a very different picture emerged.

In 1979 a PPA National Sub-committee for Mother-Toddler Groups was formed to spread information, act as a voice and publicist and also to act as a central resource for Mother-Toddler Groups. This Sub-committee consisted of representatives from each Region in England and Wales. I was elected to represent Wales PPA. The meetings were held regularly in London and this meant an early start from Bangor and sometimes I travelled on an overnight sleeper from Holyhead if the meeting was scheduled for a very early start. During the following year the Sub-committee spent much of its time making and strengthening the links with Mother-Toddler people throughout the Regions, supporting and encouraging them in whatever way it could.

In 1981 the Sub-committee took a recommendation to PPA's AGM in Newcastle that:

Mother-Toddler Groups are given the same consideration as Playgroups by National, Regional and local PPA and that this support is reflected in their budgeting and forward planning.

The resolution was passed convincingly.

In 1983 the National Sub-committee organised three Conference Days – in Peterborough, Manchester and Bristol. These days provided an opportunity for those who were then currently engaged in work which supported Mother-Toddler Groups to meet together and share experiences.

Following these days, which members from Wales attended, Wales PPA Training Committee organised a training day in Shrewsbury for Counties, Branches, Fieldworkers and Tutors and anyone involved in supporting Mother-Toddler Groups. Encouragement and ideas were given to organise evening or day events for Mother-Toddler people in their local area.

A Wales Regional Mother-Toddler Committee had now been formed and a number of Mother-Toddler Days were set up by the Committee and organised by Wales PPA people locally with support and financial backing from Wales Regional Training Committee. These days were held in Newtown, Caerphilly, Swansea, Llandudno, Brecon and Dolgellau. Counties then organised days at various locations within their areas. These days were important as they gave everyone the opportunity to share experiences, ideas, problems and for them to gain encouragement from each other. There was something of interest for everyone, whether they were about to start a group, were running one or they just wanted to know about the sort of things that happened at a Mother-Toddler group.

As time went on, it became more and more apparent that not only mums with their babies and young children attended but also fathers were becoming a far more familiar sight as well as grandparents and childminders. Teenagers from local schools and colleges were also regular helpers in a number of groups.

The greatest strength of Mother-Toddler Groups, whether called Pram Clubs, 1 o'clock Clubs or Mums and Tots, has always been that they were flexible, spontaneous and developed in any way that the group chose and that the group was meeting the needs of those attending at that time. Informality was important and as a group established itself it took on a life of its own.

It has always been difficult to set any specific guidelines. What worked in one place did not work in another. There was no easy answer. Each group found out for themselves what worked best for them as everyone had different needs. The type of premises, the sort of area where they were based, who initiated them, attended and supported them gave each group an individual character.

1973 seems a long time ago, but now in 2005 I feel I have come full circle. I have just had my first grandchild, Iwan, and am looking forward to my second grandchild next year. No doubt I will be attending a Mother-Toddler Group in the role of 'Nain'. It will be my turn to help and tell stories.

I would like to think that those early days of Wales PPA and the impact it had on my own life will carry on for generations to come.

Project on Safety in Playgroups

Copy of report written in 1981

Lilian Lamacraft

The origin of my project really began in February 1978, when the Pre-school Playgroup Association (PPA) of Clwyd County set up a working party to discuss the ideas of producing some slides on 'Safety in Playgroup'.

To finance the project various business organisations were approached with a view to possible sponsorship to cover the estimated cost of £100. It was felt that this was a worthy project but we were unable to obtain sponsorship. Fortunately a plea to the Wales PPA Regional Training Committee came to our rescue and our close association with the Officers of Clwyd County Council Social Services and Education Departments supported the idea resulting in the permanent loan of a carousel projector and technical advice and assistance to produce a slide-tape programme.

The working party met six times and it was agreed that I should liaise with the photographer and six playgroups to produce approximately 200 slides so that eventually we could utilise 70 to 80 slides suitable to show to an audience of supervisors, assistants and playgroup mothers. It was recognised that the programme might also be seen by nursery nurse students and also possibly student teachers specialising in nursery and primary education. However, it was agreed that the main emphasis would be on 'Safety in Playgroups'.

Unfortunately many of the original working party in PPA moved on and as the only original member I was determined that, after all the personal effort involved, it would be a pity not to complete the project with a taped commentary to be used in conjunction with the slides.

Following the selection of slides by the working party, pilot groups of supervisors and mothers were used for critical evaluation of our efforts. The first commentary was discarded as it did not seem suitable for the target audiences we had intended.



Esther

In devising the present commentary I attempted to add some humour into what is really a serious subject. To emphasise the seriousness, realistic sounds were introduced into the spoken commentary to purposefully shock the audience and hopefully reinforce the programme and its message.

When the photographer, Mr Ted Freeman, and I visited the playgroups we were usually greeted with enthusiasm tinged with some trepidation. However, without exception, everyone appreciated the value of the exercise and if only one injury was prevented the exercise would have been seen to be worthwhile.

I had anticipated some difficulty in getting the co-operation of such young children in some of the set pictures which we deemed necessary. However, my experience as a Playgroup Supervisor came flooding back and I greatly enjoyed getting back to the

'grass roots', playing with young children again. It was rewarding to know that I had not 'lost my touch'! The children were very interested and curious and our task was not too difficult.

The tape-slide programme could not have been produced without the help and co-operation of many people, not least the children themselves, their supervisors and mothers.

Liaison with the Ambulance Service and the hospital staff was kindly arranged by the Clwyd Area Health Authority, Area Nurse Child Health and I am indebted to Miss Margaret Roberts for her help.

Undertaking this project was a completely new experience for me and my education has been broadened. In conclusion, I would like to thank Dr John Clarke and his team from the Research Centre, Education Technical Unit of Cartrefle College. His words of wisdom and ideas were invaluable and without his enthusiasm and encouragement this rewarding project would not have been completed.

Hospital Playscheme

Margaret Jenkins

I look around my room today and I see stacks of magazines. Twenty-five years ago they would have been our PPA monthly CONTACT. Today they are Patchwork & Quilting. Yes, times have changed and I certainly have moved on but have never forgotten and am eternally grateful for what PPA did for me. As one of the County Development Officers my job description was wide. I was naïve to say the least and in the early days did not feel I warranted my pay. I remember trying to rack my brain how best to use my



Choosing the Christmas Tree

time so that my monthly work diary looked respectable. I listened to Marjorie Dykins' every word and read as much as I could, I thought about my experiences and what I felt I could do to raise an awareness of PPA and the Playgroup Movement in Gwent.

One of my experiences was having to wait in the antenatal clinic with many other women of all types and from a very wide area. There were no magazines or even a place to have a cup of tea. Children ran wild and their mothers' blood pressure soared.

An idea was developing in my mind. Perhaps HELP was needed here

I first approached the clinic with some of our magazines – the receptionist would see if they were suitable!!! A couple of months later I returned with some more. The first consignment was on the tables and had obviously been well thumbed. I had passed the first test and continued to drop off magazines for about eighteen months getting to know the receptionist quite well. I asked such questions as 'Was there a toy box for small children?' 'No, that would be difficult to manage' I was told.Lots of excuses followed and the parting shot was that they would contact me. The dreaded Consultant would have to be spoken to. Months went by. No message.

At the same time the Abergavenny Branch was developing and had strong foundations and good leadership. For reasons I cannot remember, maybe the All Wales Mental Health Strategy, I had a meeting with a gentleman in Nevill Hall Hospital and before leaving I mentioned how we had been interested in the idea of setting up crèche/play facilities in the ante natal clinic. He was the right age to accept this and gave me advice on how to set about it via him. WHO WAS THIS MAN? He turned out to be the Chief Executive for North Gwent. I must have done something right to get into his office. I vividly remember him telling us what his job entailed and just how important he was!

After that things moved very quickly. Anne Robinson, Branch Chairman and myself were summoned to be looked over by the Consultants and given the go ahead. Could we deliver? It was time for Anne to move on and a new enthusiastic but raw Branch Chairman by the name of Wendy Hawkins chaired the meeting. I think her first.

Did we have the backing of the Branch? Believe it or not there were objections but there were considerably more in favour of the project. We would go ahead. There was to be a rota of volunteers and we had money from Wales PPA to appoint a Play Co-ordinator. A supply of toys came from begging letters. We had a room adjacent to the waiting room – I did not know if this would work. I helped at a number of sessions and it was a great success, many of the children not wanting to go home.

A few months later Play Co-ordinators were employed by Newport Borough. They had strong links with PPA and they wanted to start a scheme in the Royal Gwent, a much larger hospital in the South of the County. I explained how long it had taken but we made the initial move. I really could not believe my luck. The Chief Executive from North Gwent had moved South! He had told me how important he was at our first meeting and so it appeared he was. This playscheme took a matter of months to set up and was very much needed.

At these playschemes there was an opportunity to speak with mums, dads or even grandparents, about the value of play, often putting them in contact with a nearby playgroup.

All who took part in these projects felt a tremendous sense of achievement but I firmly believe that it was the mothers and children who benefited most.

I look back at my time with PPA with very fond memories and by the time I resigned there was certainly no need for me to have to think of things to do.



Shropshire Star

Shouting from the Rooftops

Happy Memories of the Playgroup in the Sea Cadet Hall

Dorothy Clifford

We arrived in Aberystwyth in 1968 after spending four and half years in the USA. A year or so later our first child, Steven, was born.

We lived in Penrhyncoch where I was dependent upon infrequent buses to town because at that time I was unable to drive. When Steven became of nursery school age, I took him to a local Playgroup which did not suit him very well although the helpers were extremely kind.

So we tried the Sea Cadet Hall and we never looked back! Not only did Steven make new friends but I did too. Thirty-seven years later I feel 'almost a native' and meet those first new friends in town, even now. Happy memories are of coming into the big kitchen where we all congregated on arrival and of the chat and camaraderie amongst the mums. Sometimes we would go into town for coffee while the children were safely playing.

On asking my son, now a Senior Lecturer in Oncology at Newcastle Medical School, what it was that he remembered most about the Sea Cadet Hall, he replied without hesitation – 'the bikes!' But he was a sensitive soul and I remember arriving one morning to find Mrs Conway comforting him outside the story room because he did not like the idea of Peter Rabbit being put in a sack!

I found the staff to be just delightful people. Gwyneira held Steven in her arms the first few times on arrival, so that he settled down very nicely indeed. Esther was so sweet and Mrs Conway, such an excellent nursery school teacher. I felt she was so very organised and the children had such a large variety of things to do.

We were fortunate to have the Playgroup at the Sea Cadet Hall because it made such a difference to the lives of the children and the mums in Aberystwyth. I even remember a very kind Sonia Dobson coming to Penrhyncoch to pick us up for the first few times. That seemed beyond the call of duty and was much appreciated. Since then Sonia and I have known each other for many years in a different capacity at Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

I am glad to have been given the chance to express how I feel about the Playgroup. It was invaluable to Steven at three years old and I would like to send my very best wishes and great thanks to each individual person involved.

ESTHER

Joan Conway

‘No-one knows how much Playgroup meant to me – it changed my life.’

This is not a slightly over-the-top comment from a grateful parent but it is a very genuine remark made by Esther who was a Playgroup Helper in Aberystwyth for over a decade. In many ways Playgroup did change her life. Her story is worth telling.

Esther was born in 1934 suffering from a physical disorder, which meant her growth was very severely stunted. Her final height was well under four feet. She was short-limbed which gave her a slightly awkward gait. Unlike some people with restricted growth who still develop normally in spite of their size, Esther suffered from numerous health problems all her life and trips to the hospital were frequent and sometimes lengthy. Consequently, unlike her older sister, her childhood did not go smoothly and her attendance at school was erratic. In the nineteen-thirties support for children with disabilities was severely lacking and social attitudes were different from today. Disability was often seen as a social stigma. Her parents were ordinary working-class people who found it difficult to cope with having a disabled daughter. Her mother was partly over-protective and partly embarrassed by Esther’s condition to the point of ‘hiding’ her away. Esther said that when anyone came to the house her mother would hurry her into the kitchen or into her bedroom until the visitor left. As a small child she did not understand why her mother did not want her to be seen.

Her school days were not happy. She suffered from teasing and bullying. Other children imitated her, making fun of her. She was often

the butt of unkind comments and, as she once said, 'not only from the children'. As a result she grew up lacking confidence and any feeling of self-worth. Her hopes of gaining employment in those days were minimal and her life on leaving school was spent mainly in her bedroom except for being taken by her father to Chapel and Sunday school each Sunday. When she was eighteen she made friends at Chapel with someone she described as 'a fine Christian girl' who invited her to her home to read the scriptures. Esther became a true convert and her Christian beliefs proved to be a comfort to her throughout her life. Her day-to-day life however was dull and very lonely. A friendly G.P who visited her regularly would often chivy her into 'getting out' but Esther failed to respond. Then one day he said, 'They're starting a Playgroup for small children down at the Sea Cadet Hall, why don't you go to see if you can help?' It is fairly certain that Esther would not have had the confidence to do this on her own but fortunately the G.P. dropped a hint to a member of the Playgroup committee who contacted Esther, visited her at her home and invited her to help at Playgroup. So began the new phase that was to 'change her life'.

Esther helped at Playgroup every morning for five days each week becoming a fully committed member of the Playgroup team. She worked well with the Supervisors, the other Helpers, with parents on Rota and the Playgroup committee. She coped with all the rough and tumble of Playgroup without turning a hair. She loved every minute and once said that when she returned home at the end of the morning she 'couldn't wait' to be going back the next day. Esther had a lively personality and a bright sense of humour and she loved the companionship of children and staff. She took part in all Playgroup events. When the children were taken to the beach, to the woods or to a farm Esther went too. She shared in children's birthday celebrations, Christmas parties and in Playgroup fund-raising efforts. She took part in committee meetings where she enjoyed the discussions on Playgroup matters as well as the chat and gossip. She was never patronised or pitied but was accepted as an equal. And, of

course, the children loved her. She was small enough to fit into the Wendy House, as it was then called, and join in the make-believe play and she was comfortable sitting round the small tables sharing the jig-saws, Lego or playdough. She chatted happily to the children and listened to them. As far as the children were concerned Esther was simply a friend who they looked out for every day. Often a toddler would arrive at Playgroup in the morning and run swiftly into the hall saying. 'Where's Esther?' She cherished the unconditional friendship of the children and the companionship of all who worked alongside her. It is no wonder that she said that 'Playgroup changed her life.' Others noticed this change especially her father with whom she lived, her sister having moved away and her mother having died. Esther described how, shortly after she started at Playgroup, her father said to her, 'I don't know what goes on down at that hall but I've never seen you look so happy!'

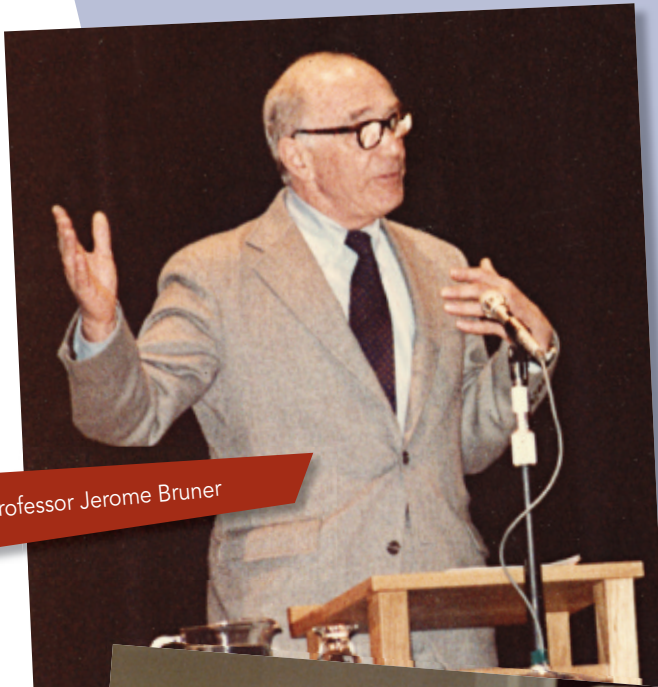
In later years, long after she had left Playgroup, she would talk about the children as if she had been with them only yesterday. She remembered their names and was eager to hear news of them – where they were working, whether they had got married and she was touched by the one or two that took the trouble to drop her a line and occasionally call on her. Because of failing health she became permanently housebound and, whilst she received all the assistance the statutory authorities could provide, it was through the daily care and commitment of her friend and neighbour, Brenda, that she was able to end her days in her own home. She loved to have visitors, especially those with Playgroup connections. To one of those she once described what Playgroup had meant to her as follows: 'Before I helped at Playgroup my life was dark. When I started at Playgroup it was like someone switching on a huge bright light.' Those were her very words.

Esther died just before Christmas in 2004.

PRINCESS OF WALES, Patron of PPA



National PPA Conference, Llandudno 1983



Professor Jerome Bruner

Photography Tempest Ltd.



Lady Plowden greeting Sir Wyn Roberts, Under Secretary of State of Wales

Wales PPA Inaugural Meeting July 1987



Assembled delegates



Professor Roger Webster

Field Staff Wales



Sponsored bike ride about to start



Outdoor play

‘Memories Light the Corners of my Mind’

Maureen Gallop

The Barbara Streisand song reminds me that ‘Memories light the corners of my mind’, and there are many daily occurrences which certainly remind me of my time as Playgroup Leader at St Padarn’s, Aberystwyth.

Walking through Parks where the Michaelmas Daisies are now flowering reminds me of the walks with the children through the gardens of the Convent. In particular, one little girl’s comment ‘We grow Michaelmas Davies in our garden miss’. Mentally they have been ‘Michaelmas Davies’ ever since.

The many school buses that are around remind me of the homeward rides of the children from Playgroup. We hired Roberts Taxis and Mr Jones was designated to drive us. He was kind and patient with the children. As we chugged up the hill in Penparcau our last delivery was a little boy called Jonathan. Approaching his home his mother would be waiting for him ‘Who’s that?’ we would playfully ask him. His face appeared above the back seat like a Mr Chad, a smile from ear to ear spread across his face and with such love and pride in his voice he would say ‘My Mam’.

As Christmas approaches recollections of Yuletide in the Playgroup are many. We had several Malaysian children and they joined in our festivities. Perhaps ‘political correctness’ hadn’t emerged then for no one ever complained. In fact they were most enthusiastic.

Further memories come back to me. The nurse working in the Convent smiling and waving to us. Children from the Primary School looking longingly at the games and toys they no longer

played with (maybe bringing back memories for them of their own time in Playgroup).

There were of course days when things did not go smoothly, parents being very late collecting their offspring, cantankerous children, a more than usual mess with clay, paint, water, sand. Strange to say although these unwelcome memories have faded the good ones have remained.

What's in a Name?

Joan Conway

In Wales surnames can sometimes present a problem. How does one distinguish one Jones or Williams from another Jones or Williams? Initials are useful with the result that O R Jones or T J Williams might be referred to as 'O R' or 'T J' and everyone knows who they are. Sometimes an additional explanatory phrase may be routinely added to a name, e.g. 'Williams the Milk' or 'James y Bara'. 'Conways' however are much thinner on the ground so, apart from being associated with the famous Castle and seaside town, I have not had any major problems with my name until one day in February 1985.

In that year I was coming to the end of my four-year stint as Chair of Wales Regional Training Committee and we were planning a major training day for the Region. It was decided to take 'Publicity' as our theme for the day. There was a general feeling amongst many members that PPA did not sell itself enough. Also, National Playgroup day was fast approaching so publicity would be important. We decided to call our day 'Shouting from the Rooftops' and the day was to take the form of a mammoth multi-workshop – a hands-on session on all aspects of publicity and public relations. The aim of the day was to help our members to learn how to get their message across using all forms of media. We booked the large hall in the Gateway Centre, Shrewsbury and we planned what workshops to organise. Several of our Committee were willing to lead individual workshops and we found a local radio enthusiast who agreed to come in to pass on tips about using radio. Knowing how to submit material for the press – local or national – was seen as an important area to cover

so I looked round for someone who might lead this section for us. I hit upon the idea of approaching the 'Shropshire Star' newspaper to see if a member of their staff might help us out. The offices of the 'Shropshire Star' happened to be just across the road from the Gateway Centre so I decided to walk across to make some enquiries.

The Reception Office had a rather dark uninviting air about it but I went up to the high counter and spoke to the lady behind the desk, explaining my mission. With not much enthusiasm she enquired my name and said she 'would ask'. She seemed to be rather longer on the telephone than I would have expected and she kept casting glances in my direction as she spoke. Eventually she said someone would be 'down directly'. Sure enough a pleasant young man appeared and invited me to follow him. Up the stairs we went and I was led, not into a small office as I had expected, but into a large and busy room full of desks, telephones and people, a real hive of activity. I felt slightly daunted by this but nevertheless I followed the young man through the throng to the gentleman at the far end of the room who occupied the largest desk of all. Clearly this was the top man! I wondered how I came to deserve this treatment.

As I approached, the gentleman rose from his desk to shake my hand and motioned one of his staff to provide me with a chair. He smiled and asked how he might help. I wondered how my simple mission was going to live up to my entrance. However, I took a deep breath and explained about the PPA Publicity Day to be held in the Gateway and asked if a member of his staff might be able to help us. My request was listened to with courtesy and a number of questions followed during which he asked me where I lived. When I replied that I lived in Aberystwyth a slight query crossed his face and soon all was revealed.

It so happened that at the time the sitting MP for Shrewsbury was a Derek Conway and I had therefore received the red carpet

treatment appropriate for the wife of an MP! We both saw the funny side of the misunderstanding. However, the 'Shropshire Star' did us proud. Not only did they send a member of staff to take part in our day but also a reporter and photographer. A full report of our training day appeared in the 'Shropshire Star' of Thursday 7 February 1985 under the heading 'In Praise of Playgroups'. The article not only described our workshop day but also gave a real 'plug' for Playgroups quoting the number of Groups in Wales. In addition two photographs accompanied the article, one of Jenny Bullough demonstrating poster making and another showing four of us, Virginia Lowe, Myfanwy Baggs, Daphne Lewis and myself, hands cupped to our mouths as if 'shouting from the rooftops'! Sixty delegates attended our day, including ten from Shropshire, and the 'Shropshire Star' provided the biggest publicity coup of the event!

Edna meets Brenda – my first County AGM

Edna Kirby

A bright summer's morning in the early 1980s: a very new Area Organiser far from her home county of Essex is watching, 11 miles south of Aberystwyth, for the 'lift' that will take her to her first Dyfed PPA Annual General Meeting

... I had no idea, as I waited that day, what a County Annual General Meeting would be like. I knew, of course, that there would first be business to go through and then – I was told as we headed towards Carmarthen – there was a guest speaker who was travelling from Chelmsford to entertain us. She was Brenda Crowe, who had been the first National Adviser for PPA. After the reports and resignations and appointments came lunch and it was then that I found myself sitting next to the guest of honour. Much of that day is a hazy memory but I clearly remember asking Brenda about the long journey from Chelmsford to Dyfed and saying that I was born and brought up in Essex.

'Whereabouts?' came the reply, to which I answered, 'A small village sort of between Colchester and Chelmsford.'

Brenda then followed with, 'I lived for a time in that area – near Braintree and my children were born in the hospital there.'

And so it transpired that Brenda's home 'near Braintree' had been at the bottom of the village green in Wethersfield where I grew up, and she went on to recount how happy she had been in the early days of her marriage 'pushing the pram up the hill in Wethersfield'.

Although I do not myself remember her and her family as occupants of the house in question, she had memories of my

father. This was particularly significant for me as he had died just a few years previously, and that lunchtime we shared many recollections and much appreciation of English rural life in the immediately post-war years.

Her own and other Playgroup people's memories were to be the topic of her talk. The sharing of early memories has a particular significance for Brenda and I was delighted when she presented me with a copy of her book *Play is a Feeling* which also deals with this subject and was delighted when she inscribed it 'How lovely to meet Fred's daughter.' Since then I have taken it to many courses and read her words to many childcare workers

'..... the feeling that accompanies the word 'play' had never left me. There are days when cooking a meal interrupts what I am doing and I resent the time taken But there are others when I play in the kitchen all day long ...'

I later came to know Brenda a little better and visited her at her home in Chelmsford where she contributed material for our Aberystwyth Branch newsletter. The passage of time and two house moves mean that sadly I no longer have a copy of that Newsletter. I wonder if anyone out there does?

Certainly that first County Annual General Meeting was for me a most memorable PPA day. And I learnt then that, even if it's the chores that have to be done, so long as it's what you **want** to do, doing anything can be fun. And now, in another century this PPA grandmother remembers that, when she shares in children's play.

Playgroup Supervisors and their Development

Barbara S Thomas

This is my personal brief account of my involvement with PPA from a fading memory – 1965 to 1970!

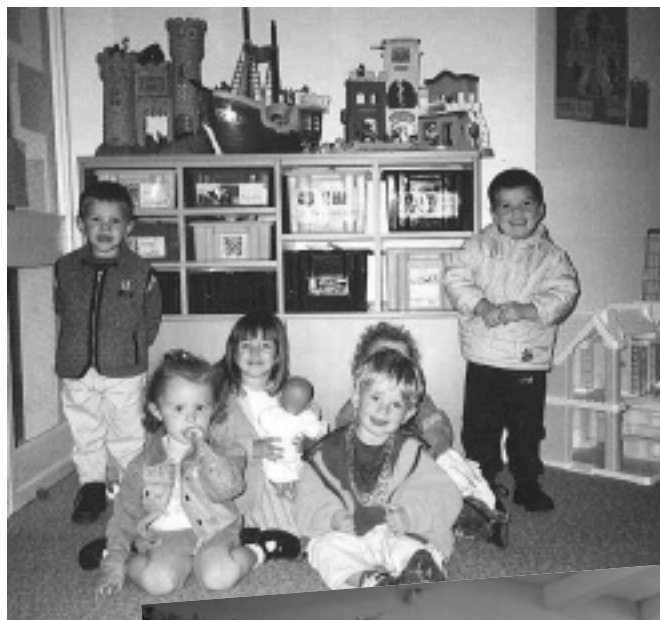
Nurse Lees was a Health Visitor at Mercier House Clinic in Rhyl. I had met her in 1959 in Flint after my son Huw was born. We met again in Rhyl during 1965 when I had my third child Mai. She asked me if I was interested in starting a Wives' Group at the clinic. After thinking about it I agreed and prompted by the now famous Guardian letter/article on Playgroups included that as a project for such a group.

The clinic was offered free as a Playgroup venue with some reservations from the caretaker on sand and water play. A candlewick bedspread was seen as ideal to collect spilt sand and prevent it spreading!

This Wives' Group raised money for toys by holding Christmas Fairs, a Summer Strawberry Fair and an Easter Bonnet Parade (hats supplied by Pierce's Hat Shop) and it snowed! People gave toys, my son has never forgotten that I borrowed his punch ball and that it was stolen during a break-in at Mercier House.

We also ran a summer holiday group in the changing rooms and grounds of the Marsh Road Playing Fields. Later when we opened Vale Road Playgroup we held a large jumble sale. I remember this being a learning curve for me when we saw clothes being stolen from under our noses!

In the early days training courses were few and far between. Cathie Barrett, one of the first appointed and paid supervisors at Mercier House Group, and I travelled to Crewe every Friday to the



College of Further Education to gain, after several weeks, a Certificate of Attendance. We covered some Child Development and Play, and spent a lot of time discussing the plight or otherwise of living in Glasgow tenements. The support from PPA and the first visit to the County by Brenda Crowe, National Adviser PPA, helped mould our practice. Nursery or NNEB trained helpers were hard to find. Secondary school trained teachers were qualified but were not always in tune with, or sympathetic to, the aims of playgroup and the desire to incorporate parents. Indeed, in the beginning some primary schools found playgroup children disruptive when they joined main school education. Closer liaison helped iron out these difficulties in part if not always completely.

The then Director of Education of Flintshire was helpful and gave us the support of Miss Glenys Edwards, Nursery Adviser, who came to my home. We held many meetings around our kitchen tables in those days. She gave us practical ideas, suggested topics and encouraged us. I think we visited a local nursery.

The WEA funded training days and evening courses. I recall one weekend event at Kelsterton College. The Library agreed to loan books for children and adults. At national level the AGMs which grew from day events to whole weekends provided workshops, and the opportunity to glean information from others.

Local firms were helpful, e.g. a milk float from the Co-op Dairy was turned into a Magic Roundabout by Jack Griffiths, Sheila's husband, to advertise our movement in the local carnival. Galt Toys gave displays and discounted equipment.

As the movement grew transport to meetings was not always easy but we borrowed family cars and shared journeys.

At some point I became an Area Organiser. I believe Joan Hand who ran the local Rhyl Nursery was our first AO. Training meetings for AOs were held in London. I remember well the topic 'Water Play'. On returning to our areas we demonstrated to others. This

was to inform Playgroup Supervisors and also parents who helped, not only how to present various types of play, but why. When boats were in the water bath, Richard Scary's pictures of numerous kinds of boat provided the opportunity to add to a child's vocabulary. For me this was great fun and deeply satisfying.

The Plowden Report and Keith Joseph's 'Cycle of Deprivation' had an impact. The desire to enable others, in less affluent areas, to experience playgroup for their children and themselves resulted in the summer play schemes and Vale Road Playgroup.

The sequence of events is unclear now but by becoming an AO I became involved in helping set up County organisations, knocking on the doors of Health and of Education in Anglesey and Caernarvon requesting support to hold a meeting of interested people to share our experiences. I think it was John Watson, Chairman of PPA, who spoke at Anglesey. Looking back I sometimes think it was 'fools rushing in where angels fear to tread'.

Health and Education were keen to have a County Committee with which to work rather than with individual groups. Health gave us two workers who had previously worked in the field of TB to advise on regulations, registration and standards.

To raise money for a County organisation a Dinner Dance was held in Northop Hall Hotel and Brenda Crowe came as our after dinner speaker. I had several sleepless nights as I worried about the costs and rewards of such an event!

The statutory bodies were, in my memory, very helpful as was Joan Hand in Rhyl. Again they helped when a North Wales Association was founded. Shire Hall in Mold was available for meetings. I know I chaired meetings at all levels but which and when I don't recall.

The Wives' Group at Mercier House formed a Mother and

Toddler Group and toys from Playgroup were shared. This did not always run smoothly when toys were broken or not stored to each group's satisfaction.

As a result of my involvement with PPA I became a Social Worker. The topic for my chosen piece of research was 'Playgroup Supervisors and their Subsequent Development'. It was fascinating to learn just how many people, after experiencing the 'Playgroup Movement' went on to further education having gained confidence and skills within playgroups. A copy of my dissertation was placed with the National PPA.

Approximately four years ago Mai returned to live in Wales with her three, soon to be four children and her husband. She enrolled Taliesin in the local Ysgol Feithrin, becoming chairperson shortly afterwards.

The Job of PPA Development Officer

Margaret Jenkins

The job of PPA Development Officer was one that would have been very difficult to do without the support of the family. I was fortunate in having 100% from my husband and parents.

My daughter, Abigail, has finally got engaged and now has a larger house SO I am taking a box a visit to get rid of her belongings! (The only way they will move.)

Of course this takes time because you just have to look through the primary school books, etc don't you? Well Abigail's News Books are full of PPA stories. Here are a few, spelling corrected.

'Last night I went with Mum and Dad to Chepstow. Mum went to her PPA meeting and Dad and I had a drink and cake in the Severn Services.'

'On Saturday Dad took me to meet Mum at PPA there were Christmas shops there but we did not buy anything'. (I really cannot believe that.)

'When the snow came I was staying with my Nan and Bamp. Mum was away with PPA (remember the Regional Council marooned in the snow at Preston Mountford for several days). I did not see her for days and days.'

One of my first outings as Gwent Development Officer was to attend the Annual General Meeting of Wales PPA in Cardiff on a Saturday. Now this proved difficult. Husband in work, son to be taken to rugby, daughter to parents and only one car which had to be left at a place where my husband could pick it up. I made the decision to go from Govilon – Abergavenny – Ebbw Vale and to travel to Cardiff by train from Rhymney. A long way round but I

thought the most convenient. I had done this journey numerous times when a teenager and I assured my parents that I could make it. My father obviously had his doubts. I must have been mad, by the time I left Ebbw Vale I was running late. I remember Rhymney being a lot closer when we used to go to the rugby internationals. The car journey was endless.

I eventually arrived at the station to find the Station Master shouting 'Mrs Jenkins to Cardiff for the Welsh Office. We'll sort your ticket out on the train. We are at least five minutes late but your father rang to say you have a very important meeting to attend.' All passengers were peering out of the window. The carriage door was wide open for me to enter, the door slammed closed behind me and he gave his whistle a blow for us to go.

Can you imagine it? I nearly died from embarrassment. I was probably scarlet and remembered thinking this is going to be a long journey. Thank goodness I did not know any of the other passengers.

As you can imagine my Dad was quite a character, my Mother very quiet and unassuming but neither fully understood my job. After years of teaching they could not understand what I did and who paid me. I had told them that my money came from the Welsh Office. Like many parents they thought their child had the best and most important job.

..... Well I suppose I did.

But Who Looked after the Staff?

Judith Bray

It had become clear soon after the Wales Region of PPA was set up in 1976 that the Region needed its own Personnel Committee. Its funding came from a separate source, the Welsh Office, and it also had a different pattern of employment from that in the ten English Regions.

One of my early jobs as Committee Chairman was, with others from Wales, to meet the Chairman of the National Executive Committee of PPA and other key National members, in London. We discussed the anomalies that had developed because of our unique circumstances and left with the task of amending and updating the employment documents to fit the situation in Wales.

At that time Wales Region employed nine Field staff, four Regional Office staff and three Resource Centre staff, all of whose posts had job specifications and descriptions and detailed terms and conditions of employment, so any changes in these posts added considerably to the routine business of the Personnel Committee so we were kept very busy.

At our routine quarterly meetings the Committee dealt with any matters referred by the Regional Council, Field Staff sessions, Office Management Committees or the National Personnel Committee, as well as arranging annual job appraisals for all staff. At times of staff change the Committee was responsible for advertising, shortlisting (which was often done very satisfactorily on the telephone, by means of a 'Conference' call), interviewing and appointing.

We had to get to grips with employment legislation too and invested in a copy of Croner's Comprehensive Guide. After payment of an annual subscription the Guide was updated throughout the year and barely a month passed without the arrival of closely printed sheets of new information to replace existing pages in the manual. The information sometimes took time to understand and assimilate but was invaluable in keeping the Committee abreast of changes and on the right side of Employment Law. Not that we had difficult employees but questions arose which needed answers and at one time we had the unenviable task of making a member of staff redundant when the funding which supported her post was unexpectedly not renewed.

By the time that Wales PPA became an independent organisation in 1987 the Personnel Committee was well prepared as it had already taken over an increasing amount of responsibility from the National Personnel Committee and had built up a wealth of knowledge and experience.

For me, one of the most enjoyable parts of Personnel Committee work were the occasions when I travelled the length and breadth of Wales representing the Committee at annual staff appraisals. We met in village halls, leisure centres, local authority offices, college buildings and in PPA offices, some venues bleak, with minimal furniture and facilities, some very comfortable. The appraisals were occasions for both employee and employer to discuss the requirements of the job as well as the highs and lows of the past year in terms of performance: was there a difference between the perceptions of the job, were the expectations unrealistic, did the line management work, were there any clashes of personality and, in the case of Field Staff, were they coping with the need to plan their workload and to work flexible hours?

The employment of paid staff by an organisation run by volunteers, a peculiarity of PPA, sometimes brought unforeseen

problems. It came as a surprise to me when one Development Officer explained how much pressure she felt when she saw dedicated volunteers working long hours for the Association while she herself was paid for her input. Flexible working hours could be very demanding on family life when evening meetings and overnight stays were necessary, particularly so if the totally unexpected happened. No one who was involved will forget the Regional Council Meeting of January 1982 in Preston Montford when heavy snowfall disrupted road and rail traffic and many members had at least one additional night away from home.

Job Appraisals for Development Officers followed their County Forward Planning Meeting which gave us, the visiting members of the panel, an invaluable insight into the setting in which the DOs worked. We gained a better understanding of the geography of the County and the amount of the travelling required, we heard of the role of Fieldworkers and of the extent of parental involvement in the groups – the grass roots from which the Association should spring. We saw for ourselves the strengths (and weaknesses) of the County Committee and its relationship with the statutory organisations and we became very aware that having the same job descriptions did not mean that all DOs had identical jobs.

We aimed to make the appraisal a positive experience for all involved and hearing what is done about Job Appraisals in some other organisations, I think that PPA got it right on most occasions.

I've Started and So I'll Finish!

Di Horley

My first introduction to the Playgroup Movement was in 1975. My son had just celebrated his second birthday and I had recently given birth to daughter number one. This latest event had left our son most unimpressed to put it mildly, firstly he would have preferred a brother and failing that a second dog would do, especially a puppy!

It was during one of my positive moments and a rare quiet time that I noticed an advertisement in the local newspaper advertising the fact that there was a Playgroup operating in a village Hall in Cosheston about six miles away. I eagerly phoned the contact number and, having ascertained opening times and directions, two days later saw us, son, baby and I, arriving at the hall.

Trying not to appear too eager to relinquish Keith, my dream of two hours respite with just baby was quickly dashed. Keith had to be two-and-a-half years old before he could be left because of insurance issues. Whilst talking with the other mums I realised that I too had need of adult conversation and companionship. Husband Alan was a Merchant Naval Officer and spent time on board ship for periods of three months, sometimes longer, at a time. By this time Keith was playing in the sand tray and sizing up the competition consisting of other little ones busy doing! It was pretty obvious to me that I wasn't going to easily persuade Keith to leave. Baby was asleep in her pram over in the corner of the Hall and then the supervisor uttered the words 'Why not stay? Keith can play as long as you are here with him, you could make

us all a cup of tea or coffee and chat'. Big mistake, the first of many!!

The next five months flew by with our little world revolving around three sessions a week of Playgroup. Keith played, fought, charmed and developed rapidly in every direction and baby of course she developed, and was stimulated by all the attention and last but not least so did I. I had not realised how starved I was of adult companionship and all that went with it. As time went by I became competent at mixing paints, cutting and sticking, building with bricks several bricks high, singing and reading stories and my Keith did not do too badly either!

Then oh dear, the Supervisor arrived one morning with the news that her husband had been successful in obtaining promotion at work and that the new job meant relocating to North Wales from Pembrokeshire. What was to happen to the Playgroup? Well as I now know that when in the Playgroup Movement you are in doubt you call a meeting! We did and the rest as they say is history. I took over the Playgroup along with an assistant who eventually was joint leader with me. We did this job for several years for the princely sum of nothing!! What did we gain? Our two sons went free and by then baby daughter was in playgroup in her own right. Debbie called me Auntie Di during the sessions in order to be the same as all the other children. If she had a problem or a question then she went to talk to the other Supervisor Auntie Gill. Gill's son Dan and Keith were now moving on to School. I gradually became more involved as a Branch committee person, Area Organiser, the County Chair followed by Development Officer and finally, and it is finally, as Regional Executive Officer (REO) for West Wales. Whilst County Chair of the then Dyfed I was privileged and scared witless to address and help host the Inaugural Wales PPA meeting in Aberystwyth in 1987 when Wales PPA became independent.



Photo HTC

Parents Workshop on Play

I am writing this as I near the last few weeks of work before retiring. It was thirty years ago that my and the family's Wales PPA adventure began, nearly half a life time as Keith is now thirty-two years old, Debbie almost thirty and our bonus Andrea, or Andie as she is known, is twenty-five in September.

It was whilst pregnant with Andie that I left Playgroup as Supervisor and Andie when of age and when ready, attended the newly opened Village Playgroup. By this time the Wales PPA bug had really bitten me and it is only now, thirty years later, that I am making my escape. There is no doubt in my mind that at times Wales PPA saved my sanity and made me the person that I am today. What is it that they say? Grow old, fat and grey with Wales PPA!

PPA National Conference and AGM Memories

Leontia Slay

It has been very interesting to look back at the developments in the Playgroup world in the 1960s and 70s. In that short time we changed from being just a 'Playgroup Movement', to being a fully fledged Pre-school Playgroups Association with clear-cut aims and objectives, a legal constitution, a network of co-ordinating committees at Branch, County and Regional level and a well structured National Executive Council.

During these years I was heavily involved at local level, and was very much aware, in theory, of what was happening throughout Britain, but somehow, living as I did in West Wales, I never fully appreciated the sheer size and power of PPA until I attended my first National Conference and AGM at Reading in 1978. It was quite an eye-opener to see hundreds and hundreds of PPA members converging on the Conference venue, all full of drive and enthusiasm, and to have the opportunity to listen to talks by a range of experts who all, obviously, were totally supportive of what we were trying to achieve.

By the time of the Reading Conference a clear pattern had evolved for the programme for the weekend. Members arrived on the Friday afternoon. There was a short welcome ceremony and then a keynote address that evening. Saturday was devoted to the AGM itself. This followed standard AGM format with Chairman's address, Reports, Financial Statement and follow-up matters, and then discussion and voting on the many proposals, which had been put to the meeting. A large number of members

turned up as day visitors for the AGM. There was always keen interest in the discussions and many contributions from the floor: indeed some AGMs proved to be extremely lengthy. Saturday evening usually offered a more relaxing programme. Sunday morning began with an Inter-denominational Church Service and this was always surprisingly well attended. After coffee there would be another important lecture. On Sunday afternoon there would be a closing ceremony, which included a presentation by members of the PPA Region which was due to host the Conference in the coming year.

This may not sound too taxing a weekend but the above list is only a basic outline of the many activities which were available. It would have been quite impossible for any one individual to participate in them all. There were discussion groups, question and answer sessions, National Committee surgeries, craft demonstrations and workshops. Even more appealing was the opportunity to shop in the huge displays put on by the commercial exhibitors who arrived and set up their stalls each year with a wide range of stock. It was possible to purchase everything needed for a playgroup, from giant outdoor play equipment structures to tiny items of stationery. Prices were always very favourable because the exhibitors made a point of offering generous Conference discounts. There was, too, a further opportunity to shop as many playgroups, branches, regions and even individual members set up fundraising stalls and sold a range of crafts, Conference souvenirs and other goodies.

It is perhaps unfair to mention that not everyone had the stamina to give 100% attention to the business of the Conference. On occasion members could be seen sneaking back to their rooms with large carrier bags, which indicated that they had been enjoying the opportunity of paying a visit to the local fashion stores and when we were at Bournemouth (1989) the temptation of hot sun and golden sands obviously proved too much for a

number of the 'weaker brethren'.

When I delve into a ragbag of memories from the twelve Conferences, which I attended between 1978 and 1989, I am surprised to find that my clearest memories are of minor events of no importance, while the weighty words of wisdom of the great experts have (with one or two notable exceptions) faded from my mind.

So here are a few memories to share:

I shall never forget the sheer bliss of our journey to the Newcastle Conference. We travelled First Class (an unheard of luxury in those days) thanks to the vouchers on the detergent packets, which we had been hoarding for months.

PPA Conferences were mostly held on University premises but we could not always have the use of a hall which would be large enough for the main sessions. At Reading, in a chilly spring, we sat in a huge marquee surrounded by roaring, and terrifying, gas heaters. At Nottingham the magnificent marquee stood staunchly against gales which buffeted the canvas walls and set the ornate electric chandeliers swinging wildly overhead.

In Birmingham we were housed in High Hall on the Campus, 20 floors up. We had marvellous views of course, but the provision of lifts indicated that the hall had been designed for young athletic students. By the last day some of us had strong leg muscles from climbing stairs, others had varicose veins from standing waiting patiently for the lift.

London, 1982, was, for me, the busiest of all the Conferences. We ran round making detailed notes on all the things that we **should do**, all the things that we **should not do** and all the things that we **might improve upon**, for our own Conference, the following year.

Llandudno, 1983, was, of course, just perfect in every detail! And, a year later, Exeter was delightfully relaxing - this time, thankfully, it was all someone else's worry.

Welcome TO Wales song from London A.G.M.

At the PPA AGM held in London in 1982 the Conference ended with an invitation to members to come to the AGM the following year, 1983, which was to be held in Llandudno hosted by the Wales members. The invitation was appropriately presented in song. This was it –

'You who come from Yorkshire and far off Humberside,
From Northern groups or North-West , on sunny Merseyside,
All you folk from Midlands, no matter East or West,
Of roads that you could follow, Llandudno's the best.

(Chorus) Croeso! Croeso! Croeso i chwi
That means Wales sings a welcome for 1983!

We've friends in Munchan Gladbach and Wales' linked to
Hong Kong,
From Eastern parts and South-East, from London too belong,
We've sisters come from Ireland, from Scotland, Eire too,
From Southern and South-West - All of you.

Croeso! Croeso! Croeso i chwi
That means Wales sings a welcome for 1983!

Organisers, County Reps, Mums and Dads and you,
With sisters, grans and aunties, even toddlers too –
All relatives we gather, and friends can join the troop
We welcome every brick who builds playgroup.

Croeso! Croeso! Croeso i chwi
That means Wales sings a welcome for 1983!

PPA Invades Llandudno

Ivy Webster

The most memorable year for me in Wales PPA was 1983 when PPA's National AGM and Conference was held in Llandudno. The National Executive Committee in 1981 had accepted a proposal from Wales PPA to host the AGM and Conference in Wales in 1983.

Thus began two years of planning.

The AGM and Conference had previously been held on University campuses but we did it differently. Our first suggestion had been to hold the event in Pontins Holiday Camp at Prestatyn, but we found that the holiday camp had recently changed hands and become self-catering which wasn't feasible for a busy weekend event. However, a new Conference Centre, adjoining the Arcadia Theatre, had just opened in Llandudno. This complex would provide excellent exhibition space, offices and a meeting place seating 1,100. The hotels on the Prom could accommodate all the delegates and the Astra Theatre, a short distance from the Prom, had 1,700 seats, more than enough for the National AGM. The NEC agreed that we should go ahead in Llandudno.

The Wales PPA Regional Council had decided that the Conference should be the responsibility of PPA throughout Wales. A Conference Committee was set up with representatives from each County, together with the National Adviser, one Development Officer, the NEC representative, the Bookings Team leader, the Editor of the Conference Booklet, the Treasurer and myself as Chairman. Each County took on a specific area of work under the leadership of its Conference Committee representative.

We had had experience of holding our own AGMs in Wales but this was a much greater undertaking. Most of us had attended previous National Conferences in England and had some idea of what was involved; we also gained a lot of experience and advice from the 1982 Conference held in London and I had several meetings with Eira Leach, the London Chairman. But, none of us had done anything like this before and we were all amateurs. It was a daunting task and meticulous planning was needed. We had all, however, learnt a great deal from our work in Wales PPA, we knew how to play, how to negotiate, how to approach officials, how to work as a team, how to delegate and not interfere. We looked forward to the undertaking with enthusiasm, some trepidation and a full awareness of the commitment we had taken on.

Our first task was to check out the accommodation. Angela Wilkinson (our Hotels Liaison Officer) and I had an initial meeting with Peter Hall, the Director of Tourism for Aberconwy. He was extremely helpful, though I think he had some doubts about our ability to take on successfully such a big task, but he did not know PPA then! The Conference Centre seemed ideal and we would be charged rent only for the exhibition area and the Council would also pay the rent for the Astra Theatre, which would be needed for the Opening Ceremony and for the AGM.

Early in 1982 the Conference Committee met in Llandudno and all the hotels on the Prom were visited by two or three committee members with questionnaires about prices, accommodation and meeting rooms. We found the hotel managers helpful and courteous. Inevitably, prices varied but we worked out a common booking fee for the delegates and some gained a little and others lost a little. (We did have a lower fee at four hotels whose prices were very much lower, and each English Region was allocated a number of these cheaper places.) Each time I visited Llandudno I stayed in a different hotel and thus got the feel of the place. Eleven hotels were booked initially.

From previous conferences we expected about 1,200 delegates to attend. A Bookings Team, under the leadership of Mary Foden, was set up. This team was crucial to the success of the enterprise. Delegates applied to the booking office and were allocated individual rooms. Bookings were not straightforward as individual requirements and individual choices for speakers, concerts, trips and mode of travel had to be taken into account. The Bookings Team, all volunteers, worked full-time for at least six months. By the end of December 1,100 delegates had applied. However, when the Bookings Team met again after the Christmas break, another 300 applications were awaiting and a further four hotels had to be booked.

Meanwhile other groups were meeting and working hard on all aspects of the Conference – exhibitions, transport, conference booklet, hotel hostessing, sponsorship, entertainment. For several months PPA members were working intensively to ensure that the Conference ran smoothly and that all those attending enjoyed a fulfilling and worthwhile weekend.

The title of the Conference was 'The Challenge of Diversity'/Sialens Amrywiaeth, chosen partly because members who attended meetings in London were frequently having to say 'but Wales is different' (we were funded by the Welsh Office and the grant system was different). Our programme, therefore, reflected diversity with speakers on Multiculturalism, Special Needs and Bilingualism as well as other themes.

The Conference opened in the Astra Theatre – which no longer exists. Delegates gasped in amazement as the great Wurlitzer organ rose through the floor with the organist Robinson-Clever playing traditional Welsh music. The Welsh atmosphere was further enhanced by the beautiful and poignant playing of the harpist. The Conference was formally opened by Sir Wyn Roberts, Under Secretary of State for Wales.

Then the opening speaker. We were extremely fortunate that Jerome Bruner, internationally known and acclaimed for his work on the value of play in the education and development of children, had accepted our invitation to speak at the Conference. His speech 'Play, Thought and Language' was inspirational. He spoke about what he considered to be the fundamental functions of play in the activity of children. His final sentence 'Play under the control of the player gives to the child his first and the most crucial opportunity to have the courage to think, to talk and perhaps even to be himself'. Now in the utilitarian atmosphere of the 21st Century we need to be reminded of the work of Bruner and the value of play in the life and education of young children.

The first evening ended with gatherings for the different Regions in the hotels. A very full day.

Daytime on Saturday was the AGM which was the responsibility of the NEC of PPA and the Wales Region's role was peripheral, mainly to provide the facilities. In the evening came the event which is most remembered by those attending the weekend. The Rhosllanerchrugog Male Voice Choir. It was an absolutely superb concert and the enthusiasm of everyone was overwhelming, perhaps most especially of Juliet Baxter, Chairman of the NEC. The concert had been sponsored by Aberconwy Council and had been arranged by our Wales National Adviser. Members of the Choir continued to entertain in one of the hotels until the early hours. Even so, some delegates managed to get up to attend Church Services early on Sunday morning, before attending one of the five speakers reflecting the theme of diversity: 'Working in a Multicultural Society', 'Supporting Children with Special Needs', 'Living with Two Languages'; the other two talks were, 'The Child and the Group' and 'Teenagers in Playgroups'.

The closing address in the afternoon was by Hywel Griffiths, Director of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. The title of his

address was 'A Thousand Flowers'. The quotation, he said, came from a speech by Chairman Mao 'let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend'. Hywel Griffiths used this to illustrate the 'Challenge of Diversity'.

This outline gives the bare bones of the AGM and Conference and cannot convey the excitement and enthusiasm of the weekend. About two hundred members of Wales PPA were actively involved; many were hostesses in the hotels, being on hand throughout the Conference and ensuring that everyone was looked after and welcomed to Wales. The weekend brought together, for the first time, members from all over Wales who had been working in their own Counties for months beforehand. It was a great learning experience and I feel sure that the experience gave us the confidence to establish Wales PPA as an independent organisation four years later.

For me it had been an exhilarating experience. I worked full time for about six months as did several other members of the Team. My husband commented that it had taken the Falklands Task Force a week to prepare and why had it taken us two years to set up a two day conference!

The Pre-school Playgroups Association – How it Influenced my Life, my Family and my Thinking

Anne John

Little did I think, in April 1976, when starting our youngest child in the local playgroup in Menai Bridge, Anglesey, that a whole new chapter in my life was about to open up.

Susie is the youngest of our five children and the only one to attend a playgroup, the others having attended the nursery unit attached to the primary school, which they would then attend. I had no idea how much the family would become involved in the lives of under 5s by becoming part of this local group. I had no idea then that this group had any links with any other, let alone be a member of a National Association, which at that time covered England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

No sooner had 'we' joined the Playgroup than we were involved in helping out with the parent rota, fundraising, carnivals, (oh the floats we have dressed, sometimes in pouring rain, with crepe paper, dye running fast and furious all around), play days in the summer encouraging the whole community to come along and see what we were about – but what fun and what friendships were made and remain to this day.

As this became a way of life for our family I began to realise that this was not only a social experience for young children – this was a profession in its own right. It gave women opportunities to

express their views, to change thinking in society at large and, at the same time, give children the best start in life.

I soon became a committee person; being a member of the playgroup committee, the local Branch, then the County, oh what a huge step that was. We were responsible for negotiating the grant from the local authority to help pay the very meagre wages of the fieldworkers who supported the playgroups in our area and to secure some money to pay for training.

Because my experience of playgroup was in Anglesey we had the added dimension of the Welsh language to take on board. It took quite some time for me to accept this; my thinking in those days was very much 'everyone speaks English don't they so what is all the fuss about?'. Oh how ignorance can breed arrogance. Thanks to those who were longer in the tooth and had a greater compassion than I, I soon came to respect the need and the right of Welsh speakers to be able to use their language and to make provision for their children through the medium of Welsh. I learned to work alongside our 'sister' Playgroup, which operated through the medium of Welsh, with children attending both the Welsh and English Playgroups. I learned to respect and endorse the need for those whose first language was Welsh to be able to use this in their daily lives and to introduce it to those of us not born with this ability.

By the time Susie was leaving playgroup to go to school I had decided that I too would leave playgroup and the committees on which I was involved and have some time to think and choose my path for my future. A phone call from the playgroup secretary put an end to that and I found myself back in playgroup some six weeks after Susie had left, this time as an assistant. This was a whole new ball game for me. Having five children of your own and working with the children of others was not the same and I had a lot of learning to do to ensure that the children in my care had the opportunity to learn through play, as Susie had.

Training became a real interest and I joined the local Training Committee. At this time there was no recognised training or qualification for those working in the Playgroup Movement. We were, in the main, mothers giving our time and commitment to the benefit of our children and others. Only in time was the work we did valued. Through designing and providing appropriate training we began to raise the status of the Playgroup Movement and, of course, to meet the needs of young children to enable them to develop and learn in a positive, stimulating and caring environment.



Majorie

(Contact 1987)

It seems impossible now to think that some thirty years ago no qualifications were required for anyone working in the voluntary sector with our young children. However, thanks to the hard work, commitment and belief in the cause, training became a basic requirement for all working in playgroups. We gave a presentation to the Directors of Social Services in Wales, who at that time were responsible for registering playgroups, ensuring the minimum standards were being attained. These Directors endorsed our efforts and it was recognised that all those working with young children had to achieve certain standards. However, these standards were not being met across the whole of Wales although good progress was being made.

Through interest in training my belief in the Playgroup Movement grew and grew. I became passionate about the benefits to the children and to the growth of the parents, mostly mothers at that time. It was such a privilege to watch shy and sometimes very young mums coming into playgroup, staying to help and sharing their skills with the group as a whole, and children leaving to go to school with the confidence and knowledge they had gained through playgroup. Indeed there were times when some school teachers were heard to say 'well he has been in playgroup' and not always meaning that as a compliment, because these were not shy, retiring, scared little people. The children were used to going to play with their friends in a social environment without Mum and to learning a whole range of skills through play. Playgroup was definitely the start of moving into another world for many women, giving them friendship and confidence to try new avenues.

The Playgroup Movement was paving the way in raising the status of the youngest members of our society. Learning to value our babies and young children as people in their own right – with specific needs, which had to be met – and the best way to do this was through PLAY. What a vital four-letter word it is.

There were many opportunities to learn more about children learning through play and about the Playgroup Movement. Many conferences were held and attended. Speakers of high calibre shared their knowledge and expertise with us: Professor Jerome Bruner, Lesley Webb, Brenda Crowe, Maude Henderson to name but a few. This was a very exciting time for all working in this field.

In 1983 I had the very real honour of being elected Chairman of the Wales Region of the Pre-school Playgroups Association. This was a real challenge and one which I was not at all confident I could meet. However, as is always the case with PPA, colleagues, who became friends, supported and advised me and I was fortunate to hold this position for five years. During this time the Wales Region of PPA became an independent organisation and Wales PPA was born, Scotland and Northern Ireland having taken the road to independence before Wales.

One of my first jobs as Chairman was to present our grant request to key civil servants at the Welsh Office. This was done with other colleagues, but no less a fearful time for that. I well recall not eating for two days before this meeting, really worrying that these people had the power to give us no money and if I said something out of turn or did not answer a question correctly it would be my fault. Oh the joy and relief when the grant was forthcoming.

I hope I have never forgotten that in these early days I did not have the confidence in myself to speak knowledgeably about our work and the benefits to children and families from being involved. I think it is pretty much the same for parents today – it is part of the learning process, which we were very fortunate to be part of at that special time in our society.

I still have a passionate belief that the 'needs of the child are paramount' and that if we want the best for our children then we must invest in the best possible start. The Playgroup Movement is a very different one today from that of the 60s, 70s and 80s, as is our society. It must change to meet the needs of families, but it must retain its belief that children must be valued in their own right and that they learn best through exciting and stimulating PLAY opportunities – that must never be lost.

It gives me great joy that my children who have children of their own, either are, have been or will become, part of their local Playgroup. The issues they talk about are not much different from those we talked about 20 to 30 years ago, but the needs of the families are not quite the same, so the challenges for them are different.

For as long as parents believe in the benefits of play for young children playgroups will survive. Perhaps the benefits for mothers in particular are not, and in the future will not be, as great as they have been in the past but the opportunities for development are still there.

I feel truly privileged to have been part of a Movement which has made such a contribution to our society as a whole and cannot imagine the route my life would have taken had we not become part of the Playgroup at Menai Bridge all those years ago.

A few highlights of what I feel I have learned/gained from being part of PPA in Wales:

- The geography of Wales.
- The cultural differences of the people.
- The learning opportunities.
- Opportunities to contribute to the development of this organisation.
- Learning that we were/are the experts in the world of under-fives and their families.

- The friends made, too many to list or mention.
Not keeping in touch the way I would wish but the bond is always there.
- The sadness at the loss of a friend and colleague's untimely death, the strength of the friendships made at playgroup.
- The opportunities to meet and learn from such a wide range of people.
- Fun, friendship, laughter, tears, learning, development, confidence, knowledge, compassion, respect for people's differences.

The Children Left Playgroup But I Didn't

Wendy Hawkins

My involvement with Wales PPA started when my daughter Nia joined the local Playgroup at Goytre in Monmouthshire. Little did I think that my involvement with the Playgroup Movement would last over twenty years.

I had no idea about the size of the organisation behind our local playgroup. Quickly being encouraged onto the playgroup committee I found myself with a group of Mums who just wanted the very best for their children. We thought that the playgroup staff ran the whole thing and our job was to raise the money to keep the group going. Of course, as I got more involved I realised the importance of voluntary management committees and the chance of 'growing' within the organisation.

My son, Owen followed Nia into playgroup two years later by which time I was involved at Branch, County and Wales level or Regional level as it was then. My children joined and left playgroup but I was hooked by this time and I stayed on.

I had soon found, when I joined the playgroup committee, that I had things to think about other than nappies and I welcomed the paperwork that came with the committee work. The invitation to attend PPA Branch meetings came with the idea that there was 'bulk buy' there that I would no doubt find interesting. I thought this was rather a bizarre idea as to me 'bulk buy' meant large numbers of cans of carrots and baked beans. The mystery was cleared up at my first Branch meeting when I discovered it was supplies of paint and paper for playgroups belonging to the Branch to which the term 'bulk buy' related.

I became responsible for buying paper and paint from County Supplies for the Abergavenny Branch committee to take to Branch open meetings for playgroups to buy at reduced prices. I remember taking Owen with me to collect the supplies from Cwmbran and it happened to be a particularly large load. We had a mini estate car at the time and I loaded everything in, carefully leaving room behind my seat for Owen to stand. On the road from Cwmbran Owen said, 'Mum, I am getting rather squashed!' 'You will be alright,' I replied, not realising that the paper had all moved forward holding Owen very closely to the back of my seat.

Owen, who is now 28, had no idea that there was life outside my playgroup involvement as he had only just been born when Nia and I joined playgroup. The Development Officers at the time did lots of things over and above the call of duty to help volunteers attend meetings. I remember having to attend a meeting during the day but my mother-in-law was busy, my husband too busy at work to help out and so Janet McAllister, the Gwent Development Officer, came to my rescue. She came to baby-sit for me when I had an afternoon meeting. I had made sure downstairs was tidy and had cleaned through the house. Owen of course had other ideas about the house! Janet had picked him up from playgroup and as soon as they got home he decided Janet needed to have a tour of the house. Starting with upstairs he showed her his room, Nia's room and Mum and Dad's room (they had to share he explained). Downstairs, after lunch, Janet was busy knitting while he had his head in a storybook listening to a tape, which beeped when he had to turn over a page, his favourite pastime. He looked up at her knitting and explained that his Mum was too old to knit!

During my time on the playgroup committee we had a severe snowstorm and the roof on one of the demountables fell in due to the weight of the snow. The County Council owned the property but had no inclination to re-build. This started lots of

correspondence with the Council who eventually came out to visit the playgroup. The negotiations took several years during which the committee rebuilt the playgroup roof and joined the two demountables together. During the 25th year anniversary of PPA our Playgroup committee raised over £1000 during playweek to rebuild our Playgroup.

Meanwhile I became very involved with Abergavenny Branch and enjoyed helping others organise speakers and workshops for open meetings for groups. During this time I became involved with helping as a steward at the PPA AGM and National Conference at Llandudno. Margaret Jenkins, the Gwent Development Officer at the time had arranged a Gwent meeting in Cwmbran in order for everyone to be given their jobs at the conference. All the Gwent Branches were brought together, Abergavenny, Torfaen, Newport and South Gwent and the arrangements made for travelling together and the jobs allocated. My job was to help look after the stallholders and the stands at the exhibition. I had little idea what this meant but I just agreed to help.

The stands at the Conference were amazing! Stall after stall of people selling wares for playgroups including a Wales PPA stall selling Welsh goods. I had been given some money to buy goods for Goytre Playgroup and also the Abergavenny Branch. There was an amazing wooden rocking-horse type animal on one stand and I bought two red dragons, one for the Branch toy library and one for playgroup. These were gorgeous, red and shiny and the children loved them. Bit of a tight fit, once again, getting them home in the car, together with a whole pile of Lego offers I had been asked to get for people in the playgroup.

I saw very little of the Conference and the AGM as I was so keen to carry out my role on the exhibitions. I went to bed early as I knew so few people and little did I know, till years later, what fun was had in the evening with the Male Voice Choir and everything.

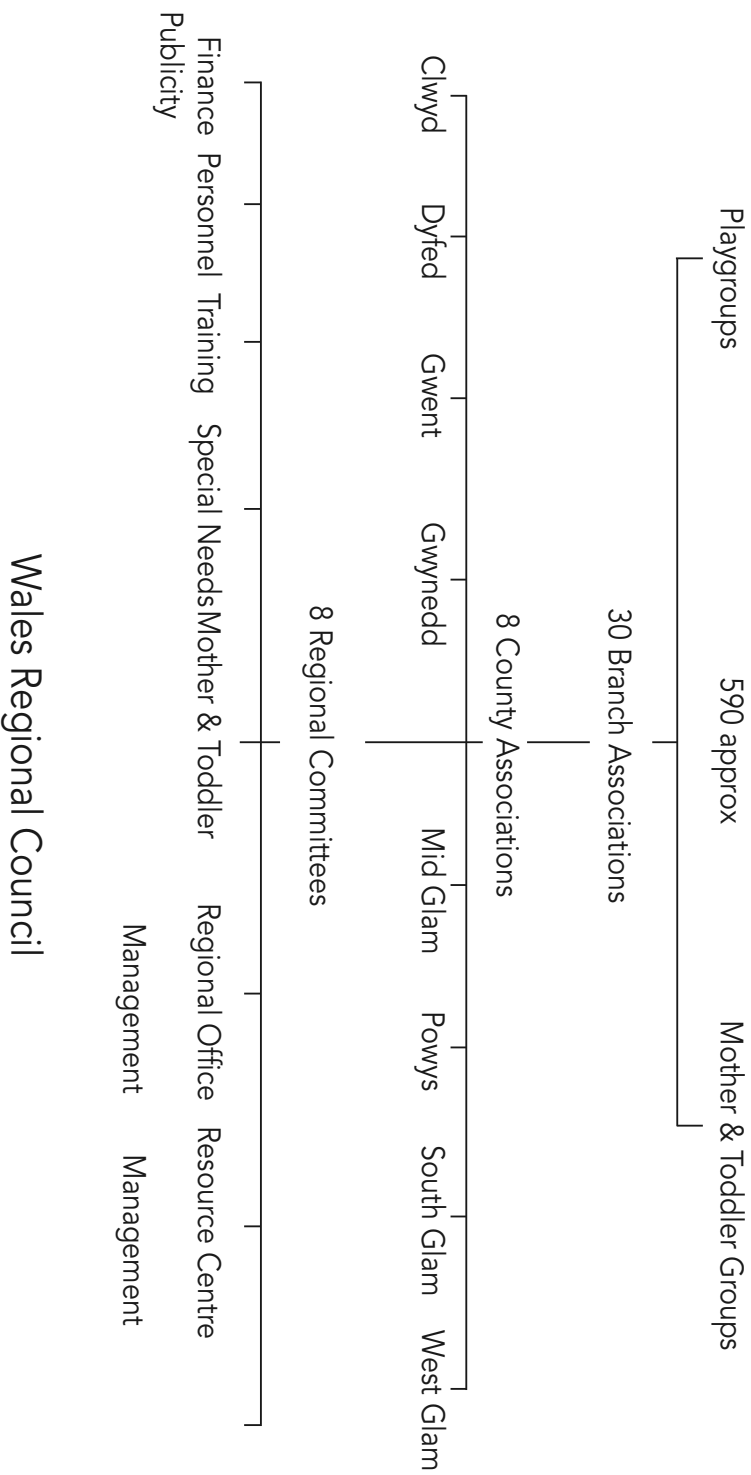
I was there but I did not have a clue what was happening around me!

During my time on Abergavenny Branch I began to learn about the Resource Centre in Pentonville, Newport which housed an amazing array of leaflets and books about good practice. The PPA Resource Centre also employed people who could make simple leaflets that were needed in playgroup. They would type them up, add pictures and run off loads of copies on the Roneo machine! Yvonne Hern was the Resource Centre Administrator and Maggie Rigler was her trusty assistant. The Resource Centre had a voluntary management committee and I soon became the Abergavenny Branch representative on the committee and then the Chair.

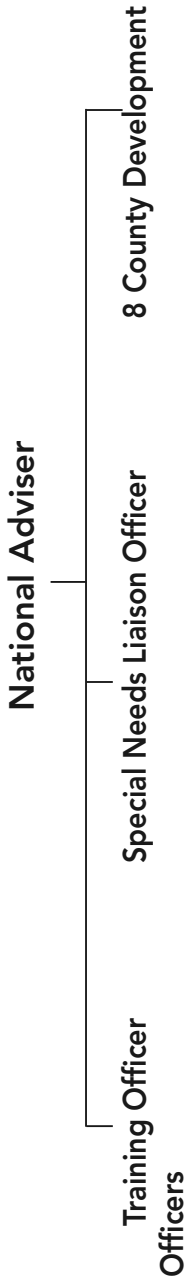
The Resource Centre and the Regional Office in Wrexham provided the administrative support for the Region but the Resource Centre also provided typing services for Counties, Branches and Playgroups. It was during this period that I began to meet other people from across Wales who represented their counties on various regional committees. As the Chair of the Resource Centre committee I also attended Personnel and Finance Committees, Joint Office meetings and Regional Council. Although many of the volunteers on these committees were different, others were the same and I developed some wonderful friendships. I also attended Wales Training Committee as a Gwent representative as somewhere along the line I became a member of the Gwent County committee. I was enjoying myself attending the various committees and learned lots of new things along the way. It was like running a small company I used to tell people who asked why did I give so much time for nothing. I was learning so many life skills!

At this time Wales was one of the eleven Regions, which made up the Pre-school Playgroups Association and representatives from Wales attended National meetings in London. There was a vacancy for the Wales representative on the National Executive Committee (NEC) of

STRUCTURE OF WALES REGION OF PPA BEFORE INDEPENDENCE



WALES REGION FIELD STAFF BEFORE INDEPENDENCE



In addition each County and Branch was able to support part-time Field Staff, depending upon available funding. These were the Area Organisers and Branch visitors.

WALES REGION ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

- Regional Finance Officer
- Regional Office Administrator
- Resource Centre Administrator

plus Support Staff – Typists, Book-keepers, etc.

PPA and I was asked to be that representative. These meetings were held in London and I managed to attend them with two young children because of the tremendous support of my mother-in-law, my husband and the fact that living in South Wales the train access to London was very good. The Regional meetings were held in Shrewsbury, where all the trains met.

As it turned out I was the last NEC representative for Wales as Wales PPA became independent in 1987.

What about the Men Folk?

Marjorie Dykins

It's fair to say that Wales PPA was, in large part, run by women: mothers, wives, partners and interested female helpers and supporters. We were often asked, 'Where are the men in the organisation?' This attempts to answer that question.

Given that most of the women had come into PPA from a desire to provide early learning through play for their children, it's fair to ask where were the children during the Committee meetings and the other multitude of actions which brought a large organisation into being? Most of us, who did not have grandparents or close friends to look after them, would admit that the men in our lives were the baby-sitters. And this was no mean task. As well as regular day and evening meetings, there were overnight, weekend gatherings. How can an all Wales organisation be nurtured and developed without getting to know and trust people from other areas? There are a number of true accounts of getting stuck in the snow, of car break downs, and late trains. During all this we relied on our men folk to hold the fort. These were, dare I say, real learning experiences for us all. We, the women, had to compile endless lists of things to do, and it showed us how complex our duties were, while our baby-sitters became convinced of those responsibilities, and found out that they could undertake them.

In another way, Wales PPA benefited from the advice, skills and experience of our men-folk. We had educators, social workers, doctors, bankers, solicitors, local councillors, architects, as well as those in touch with their communities who knew how to affect policies at different levels. You name a background and we had it. There were, of course some men who could not be bothered with what their women were up to, and a very small minority who were against the

corporate action which marked Wales PPA as a lively body. But, in the main, the men supported them and allowed them to spend a fair amount of the household budget on what came to be an enduring commitment.

I recently met a bank clerk in my local bank, who asked me how Wales PPA was getting on. I had no idea that he knew anything about us, but he told me that his wife had really enjoyed her time with us in PPA, and that he had become interested too.

Finally, we can attest that the vast majority of our men-folk supported us during the difficult times. There were many. Times when plans were overturned, requests for grants turned down, people left in a huff and we were disappointed. If we were not encouraged to carry on or to adopt a different plan, then Wales PPA would not have survived and the lives of children, parents and their communities the poorer for it. We should acknowledge the contribution of all who supported us, of whom our men-folk played a special part.

An Educationalist's Point of View

Hywel Evans

During the 1960s I found myself a Lecturer in Education at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, as it was then, responsible for developing in-service education throughout the six counties of North Wales. This was an enormously wide brief and brought me, a former secondary school teacher with eight years' classroom experience, into contact with the training of part-time youth leaders. Within a matter of months I became responsible for in-service courses for staff in primary schools, following the guidance of the local HMI and the Principal of the Cartrefle College of Education, Wrexham, and later for staff preparing for RoSLA (Raising of the School Leaving Age) and then for those involved with the reorganisation of Training Centres as schools for ENS(S) pupils. I had no direct involvement with the education of pre-school children except that one weekend when I had a small group of teachers working in the University building I realised that a much larger conference was taking place elsewhere in the building – my curiosity led me to explore – and I found a function, the organisation of which merited my professional admiration – it was the Wales PPA and the people responsible were Mrs Ivy Webster and Mrs Marjorie Dykins.

In 1973, following the untimely death of Miss Mary Taylor, Principal of Cartrefle, I was appointed her successor and welcomed the PPA's establishment of their Office for Wales on the College Campus, and encouraged links between the Movement and the training of teachers for infant children. An additional dimension was the fact that Mrs Marjorie Dykins' son and my

daughter were in the same infants' class in Wrexham and seemed unusually friendly! The romance did not prove lasting.

By the time I became Head of the secondary school at Conwy I had had the privilege of speaking at some PPA functions and found that my early belief in their professionalism was very soundly based. In consequence, when we found ourselves able to develop a programme of work experience for our pupils we welcomed links with playgroups, and it was this, I presume, that led to my being invited to deliver an address on 'Teenagers and Playgroups' at the National Conference in Llandudno in 1983. Looking back at that excellent occasion and what I tried to say I am moved to astonishment, not merely at my attempt to pour a gallon into a pint pot, but at the freedom which I, as a Head, enjoyed then in respect of curriculum and timetables long before the days of National Curriculum and endless testing. I regret nothing of what I did then with that freedom nor of what I tried to do and believe that the link between teenagers and young children can, if well managed, enrich the development and experience of both.

There are other memories which I cannot place in order – a group of our pupils on an outdoor activities weekend at Rhyd-ddu found themselves the saviours of two young ladies whose car had broken down – and they turned out to be PPA leaders who knew the school well! – and a splendid evening of 'This is your life' at the Guildhall in Wrexham.

I have had the honour of speaking at functions arranged by, and of working with, many distinguished bodies – Universities, the CNAA, the National Curriculum Council, the School Examinations and Assessment Council, the Curriculum Council for Wales, the Health Visitors' Association, the Welsh Secondary Schools' Association – but I have not found any with higher organisational and professional standards than PPA Wales, nor any with a warmer and more friendly personal touch. My every good wish for its future prosperity for the sake of our children.

A National Adviser Remembers

Marjorie Dykins

Part of a message sent by Marjorie Dykins to the NEC, to Wales PPA Council Elect and to Field Staff in England and Wales, following her retirement as National Adviser in August 1987

In reviewing ten years as National Adviser, it would be unproductive and boring to list the number of travelled miles, meetings attended, mistakes made, places visited, reports written, trains missed, documents lost or misplaced, hotels frequented, hot-water bottles and nighties left behind, arguments won or lost, introductions made, places visited and welcomes received.

My last away-day job as National Adviser was to attend the National Eisteddfod in Portmadoc and help at PPA's tent on the field. One of the delights of an Eisteddfod is to listen to the adjudicators and in gentle rebuke to one competitor, a former Chief Bard said that it wasn't the job of a poet to tell us that 2 and 2 make 4. It was, he said, a poet's calling to be surprised that 2 and 2 always make 4 and hope that sometimes 2 and 2 could make 5.

So let me borrow that super illustration from the National Eisteddfod for it gives me themes on which to base some comments in this end of year, end of career report.

2 + 2 = 4 This is the certainty of statistics
I have spent a fair bit of my time using statistics for PPA's gain and I am now more than convinced of the value of this approach. Too often we describe our activities in such terms as 'successful meetings' or 'good courses'. If we cannot easily describe the

quality content we can, at least, be number-specific. A playgroup AGM with an attendance of twenty could be 'successful', because it could represent over 75% of the membership. A branch course with twenty attending could not be 'good' if it only represented attendance from five groups in a fifty group branch. How shall we give hard evidence on the scale of PPA's contribution to the pre-school field, to adult education and to family support? I feel we should encourage the use of figures to support our quality objectives. Statistics give us the confidence and certainty to plead our cause and assess our results.

$2 + 2 = 5$ This is the seemingly impossible

One of the pleasures of my job as National Adviser was to be constantly surprised. Experience has taught me that, given sufficient support and thorough understanding of the implications, groups and counties would almost always find new officers. But I was constantly surprised when it happened, year after year and crisis after crisis. Why should we underestimate the commitment, skills and vigour of young parents? I think of those countless times when a bunch of quiet housewives tackled a County Council, no messing, challenging their views on the role of parents and on the needs of under-fives. With a combination of hard information and feminine (yes I'm afraid I'm a sexist!) skills, they pulled off the impossible time and again.

I think of the Treasurer of a PPA County Association who told me she had been called Minnie Mouse at school. This soft-spoken, apparently naïve, lady would not be diverted when asking for her county's grant to be raised above £20,000. More recently, I heard of a first annual meeting of parents in a small country school. Some schools had found difficulty attracting the required number of parents to meetings such as this, but to the surprise of the head-teacher, it was attended by over 20% of the parents, and therefore quorate. The head-teacher did not know that an ex-PPA mum had used her skills and persuaded parents of the importance of their attendance.

The strength and potential of PPA over the 21 years that I've been involved has been to expect the impossible and to plan for it. And that's how all progress is made which helps our society become a better place. Look back over your own PPA experience and you'll surely agree.

I am writing this during the last week of my employment, and doing so on a Greyhound bus on the old Santa-Fe trail through the Rockies. Memories of all the events to bid me good-bye come flooding back. It would be impossible for me to give personal and adequate thanks for all that came my way during last term. So I am winging my thanks and love to you all in this message.

Marjorie Dykins

(Marjorie was awarded an OBE in 1996)

Postscript - After 1987

As the contributions in this book illustrate, playgroups and the playgroup movement in Wales grew and flourished from the early beginnings in 1961 to become a major contributor to pre-school education through into the 70's and 80's. After the Wales Region of PPA was formed in 1976 the Association continued to grow. A grant from the Welsh Office had increased year by year and the number of Field Staff had also increased.

In the 1970's. Scotland and Northern Ireland had become independent and it became clear that the then Wales Region also could better serve the membership by being independent. So at the National Annual General Meeting in Birmingham in 1987 a proposal that the Wales Region should become independent was agreed. Therefore on 4th July 1987 an independent Wales Pre-school Playgroups Association (Wales PPA) was formally inaugurated at a special meeting of all the membership called at Aberystwyth where it adopted its own constitution. From 1987 to the early 1990's the number of groups increased dramatically. Each of the county associations, branches and all the individual groups had their own constitutions. The need for change was evident so in the early 90's external consultants were employed to carry out a Management Review of the Association and their findings and recommendations were passed on to the membership. After much consultation these proposals were accepted at the Annual General Meeting in 1995 where it was agreed to form a Company Limited by Guarantee to be managed by a Board of Trustees (National Council) consisting of members of the Association from across Wales. Many changes in its management and structure were to follow. A new committee structure and also a new staffing structure were developed. Part time Development Officers became full time Executive Officers and the management of the Association later moved to Newtown in Mid Wales.

By 2007, Wales PPA, a registered educational charity, was the largest provider of pre-school care in Wales outside the state sector. Membership of the Association consisted of playgroups, parent and toddler groups, full day care groups, interested individuals and companies. Over 30,000 pre-school children and their families were involved through 1,100 Wales PPA members across Wales. The annual Welsh Assembly core grant had risen to £260,000 but the overall income was now over £1m including income from sponsors, supporters and fund raising.

With increased emphasis on the importance of the early years in education, Wales PPA has risen to the challenge to raise standards in their groups ensuring that playgroup provision caters for all areas of early learning. Undoubtedly the organisation will forge ahead with new vigour to meet the demands of the twenty-first century but hopefully it will retain the spirit and ethos of this unique form of pre-school provision.

Appendix 1

Time Line

Significant dates in the development of PPA in Wales:
1961 to 1987

1961

In August Belle Tutaev wrote the letter to 'The Guardian', which began it all.

1962

The National Association of Pre-school Playgroups was formally constituted and registered as a charity. Throughout the rest of the decade more playgroups opened and local Branches were formed. Some Branches obtained Local Authority grants enabling them to employ part-time Area Organisers.

1966

Brenda Crowe was appointed first National Adviser (England and Wales).

1967

The name of the Association was changed to 'Pre-school Playgroups Association'.
The PPA logo was designed.

1968

The first Welsh County Association was formed in Flintshire.

1973

The first grant was received from the Welsh Office to fund the salary of a National Adviser for PPA in Wales.

Myfanwy Edwards was appointed first National Adviser for Wales, with an office at Newport.

The North Wales Association was formed.

1974

Mother and Toddler Groups started to spring up all over Wales.

The first All Wales Conference took place in Llandrindod Wells and was addressed by Belle Tutaev. At this meeting there was a proposal to set up a Wales Region of PPA and subsequently the Wales Region Working Party was formed.

1975

Three part-time Development Officers were appointed to cover the whole of Wales.

The first Foundation Course syllabus was designed and Clwyd took the lead in providing courses for volunteers and paid workers at all levels.

The South Wales Association was formed.

1976

Wales Regional Committee was formed with volunteer representatives from each county. Its first meeting was chaired by Marjorie Dykins and later in the year Ivy Webster became the Chairman.

The Welsh Office granted £18,000, which paid for the Wales National Adviser and contributed to paying the running costs of the Region.

Myfanwy Edwards retired and became President of the Wales Region of PPA. Marjorie Dykins was appointed National Adviser in her place.

The Regional Office was moved to Cartrefle College, Wrexham and the Newport office became The Resource Centre.

Sub-committees were set up to deal with Finance, Personnel, Training, Emergencies (to make decisions and take action if necessary, between full Regional Council meetings) and WaPPA (a newsletter).

The first issue of WaPPA was produced.

An All-Wales Conference was held in Cardiff with Lady Plowden as the special guest and speaker on 'A new look at pre-school provision'.

The Welsh Office grant was £28,000.

The Regional Committee was re-named The Regional Council.

Five part-time Development Officers were in post sharing the work of the eight counties.

Sub-committees were set up to manage the two offices.

Thoughts on independence from England, were voiced.

The First Annual Meeting of the Wales Region was held in Aberystwyth, with speaker Mr Raymond Clarke of the Personal Social Services Council.

1978

The Welsh Office grant was £36,000, but later in the year an additional £20,000 was awarded, £15,000 of which was paid out directly to playgroups in need.

The Regional Office was opened by Mr Barry Jones, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales.

A Regional Communications and Media Sub-committee was formed.

Three Foundation Courses ran in North Wales.

The Annual Meeting was held in Newtown, with speaker Mary Bruce, General Secretary of PPA.

1979

The Welsh Office grant was £43,000.

The Annual Meeting was held in Cardiff, with speaker Minette Gee, one of the PPA National Advisers.

1980

The Welsh Office grant was £57,000.

There were now eight part-time Development Officers in Wales, one for each county.

One day per week of Field Staff time was dedicated to training.

A Regional Special Needs Sub-committee was set up.

The North and South Wales Associations were disbanded.

The Annual Meeting was held in Wrexham, with speaker Mr Barry Jones MP.

1981

The Welsh Office grant was £70,000.

A fourth Foundation Course was validated.

A working party reported on discussions on independence for PPA in Wales.

The Region created a link with the Hong Kong branch of PPA, whose founder came from Wales.

Wales Region hired a stand for the first time at the Royal Welsh Show.

The Annual Meeting was held in Newport, with speaker Mr Neil Kinnock MP.

1982

The Welsh Office grant was £82,000, £8,000 of which was to fund additional time for Development Officers to devote to Special Needs.

It was the 21st birthday of the Pre-school Playgroups Association and HRH Princess Diana agreed to be its Royal Patron.

A Regional Mother and Toddler Sub-committee was set up. The Annual Meeting was held in Llandudno, with speaker Gillian Pugh of The Children's Bureau.

1983

The Welsh Office grant was £86,000.

Wales Region hosted the PPA AGM and Conference at Llandudno; representatives of all counties were involved in arrangements for the impressive occasion which was attended by 1600 delegates. The opening address was given by Professor Jerome Bruner.

The Annual Meeting was in Brecon, with a Question and Answer session chaired by Professor Roger Webster.

1984

The Welsh Office grant was £92,450.

The Presidency of the Wales Region passed from Myfanwy Edwards to Ivy Webster.

The new Regional Office at 2a Chester Street, Wrexham, was opened officially by Mr Wyn Roberts, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales.

PPA held a Parliamentary Reception in Westminster.

The Annual Meeting was in Cardiff with speaker Tom Crabtree, educational journalist of 'The Guardian'.

1985

The Welsh Office grant was £97,300.

The Mother and Toddler Sub-committee was disbanded and its work taken over by Development Officers.

The Annual Meeting was in Wrexham, with speaker Professor Donald Court.

1986

The Welsh Office grant was £104,000.

PPA celebrated its silver jubilee and Wales Region of PPA its 10th anniversary. A 10 years reunion buffet supper was held in Cardiff with Lady Plowden as a special guest.

Two Teddies took an Incredible Journey through Wales starting in Holyhead and Tywyn, ending in Maindy Stadium, Cardiff and visiting every PPA branch on the way.

A new working party was set up to consider the implications of independence from England; later in the year all counties backed a proposal for independence.

The Annual Meeting was in Caerphilly, with Chairman Mr Kenneth Hopkins, Director of Education in Mid Glamorgan.

1987

The proposal for independence was taken to the PPA AGM in Birmingham where it received approval.

The Inaugural Meeting of Wales PPA Cymru took place in Aberystwyth on 4th July.

Marjorie Dykins retired in August and Wendy Hawkins was appointed National Adviser.

The Deed of Transfer was signed in November and Wales became independent.

Appendix 3

WALES REGION FIELD STAFF BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

National Adviser

**Training Officer
Officer**

**Special Needs Liaison
8 County Development Officers**

In addition each County and Branch was able to support part-time Field Staff, depending upon available funding. These were the Area Organisers and Branch visitors.

WALES REGION ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Regional Finance Officer

Regional Office Administrator

Resource Centre Administrator

plus Support Staff – Typists, Book-keepers, etc.