



ABSTRACT

Report for Raymond Williams Foundation on the tour that took place 15 October 2022

Russell Todd

Valleys Ale Trails | Llwybrau Cwrw y Cymoedd

RAYMOND WILLIAMS CENTENARY BUS TOUR



Background

One day tour hosted by Valleys Ale Trails, in partnership with the Raymond Williams Foundation, at venues across south Wales as part of the Raymond Williams Centenary celebrations

Format

The tour visited locations with a connection to Raymond Williams's life and work with talks from Welsh writers and people from civic life:

Location	Connection to RW	Speaker
Pandy Village Hall	Birthplace	Jude Rogers Merlin Gable
Merthyr Tydfil, Redhouse	Proxy for working class cultural institutions; venue for Michael Sheen's 2018 RW Memorial Lecture	Leanne Wood Selwyn Williams
Aberdare, Cynon Valley Museum	RW's father lived and worked in Aberdare for a short time after WWI	Darren Chetty

The first choice of Oakdale Institute at St Fagans Museum of Welsh Life was unavailable due to overrunning construction work and an alternative venue there could not be provided. Options in Blaenavon were also explored without success.

Themes

The speakers' themes were discussed beforehand with Russell to ensure a blend of topics and perspectives:

Jude Rogers – Jude provided personal reflections on returning to Wales inspired by the return of Matthew Price in Border Country.

Merlin Gable – Merlin explored the psycho-geography of borderness using an old tramway that once linked Gofilon wharf to Hereford, via Pandy; but not borderness in a national sense, but in respect of the traditional notions of borders between the country and the city, inspired by Williams's book of the same name. Merlin also led a short walk along the route of the tramway just to the east of the Wern Gifford estate.



Selwyn Williams – Sel reflected on the practical experiences of his organisation, Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog in forging a new approach to grassroots community development in Wales. Inspired by Williams's 1984 essay 'Decentralism and the Politics of Place', Williams gave a flavour of their Arts Council for Wales-funded Pontio Cenedl | Bridging the Nation project.

Leanne Wood – invited us to consider what we can learn for today from Raymond's writings and interviews to unite and align the green, minority nationalist and socialist forces in the way that he

imagined, and in particular invited us to consider what a new socialism might look like and is the 1968 May Day Manifesto a good model for building alliances of positives?

Darren Chetty – inspired by Williams’s 1975 essay ‘Welsh Culture’ in which Williams remarked, “When we hear the word ‘culture’, some of us reach for our fancy dress”, Darren invited us to imagine Welshness as both distinct and inclusive and located in the contemporary context of to our understanding of Welsh culture and indeed Welshness itself. It is fitting that our presentation and our community discussion will take place at this site.

In addition, Russell led a group to ‘old’ Pandy and explored Llwyn Derw, the chapels, pubs and other social infrastructure with which Williams would have grown up as a child.

Attendees

Including speakers and tour helpers, there were 38 places filled on the tour, with 36 attendees on the day. Other noteworthy data:

- All 13 early bird tickets sold out in the window available (until the end of August)
- There was a 40:60 split between male and female attendees
- There was attendance from people in every age category used by the census i.e., 16-20, 21-30 and so on, except 65+

Sponsorship

Planet – The Welsh Internationalist sponsored the event (£100). Others supported it in kind.

- Red Pepper provided all attendees with complimentary copies
- Carried an [online article](#) beforehand
- The Redhouse provided complimentary copies of its Heroes and Villains publication of key historical figures from the town; and a copy of the guide chronicling its redevelopment

Feedback

Overwhelmingly positive both from attendees and speakers. The venues all expressed an interest in being involved in similar events in the future. A sample of tweets are below:

<https://twitter.com/LeanneWood/status/1581333880535076864>

<https://twitter.com/ToursofWales/status/1581239481457598465>

<https://twitter.com/rapclassroom/status/1581948331466493954>

<https://twitter.com/LivingPolly/status/1581557844817895425>

<https://twitter.com/ToursofWales/status/1581379184638558208>

<https://twitter.com/MinnieKeats/status/1581564528579383296>

