

Don't cry for me Aberaeron

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Shan Morgan explains how her Ceredigion roots helped guide her to her present role as British Ambassador in Argentina.



"It was my grandmother who first told me about the Welsh community in Patagonia - I never imagined I'd visit it myself. But I found myself there last February on my first official visit as British Ambassador to Argentina.

This is the first job I've had with a strong Welsh connection - and it was one of the reasons it appealed to me. Both sides of my family are from Ceredigion originally, and childhood holidays always included a visit to Mamgu Davies' cottage in Ffosyffin, not far from the farm in Gilfach yr Halen where Mamgu Morgan was brought up.

Like many Cardis, both sets of grandparents moved to London before the Second World War to set up in the dairy business, but they always kept in close touch with Wales.

My parents were both evacuated to Wales during the war - my mother to Dowlais and my father, Alun Morgan, to his uncle's farm in Mydroilyn. He went to the excellent grammar school in Aberaeron - and attends the school reunions regularly.

My father's career as an RAF pilot took us all over the world - from Singapore to Hong Kong, Cyprus and America, interspersed with postings to RAF stations in bracing Lincolnshire.

Going to Wales on holiday always felt like coming home. Having Welsh-speaking parents made me determined to learn the language myself - so I've spent many happy summers studying on the Wlpan Awst courses at the university in Aberystwyth.

I visit Wales every year on holiday and always meet up with my old friends Joyce Jones from Ffosyffin and Jane James from Aberaeron.

I never expected the Welsh connection to be so important to my job. I joined the Civil Service straight from university with a degree in French language and literature.

My early career focussed on employment and training policy, based first in London then Sheffield. I gradually started specialising in European issues, with a secondment to the European Commission in Brussels.

Secondments to the Foreign Office followed - four wonderful years at the Embassy in Paris working on employment and social affairs. Then five years at the UK's Representation in Brussels, leading tough negotiations on environmental and social legislation, plus reform of the structural funds.



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When I moved back to London in 2006, I decided to transfer permanently to the Foreign Office - it's a fantastic organisation full of talented people. As Director in charge of EU policy, I worked on the controversial Lisbon Treaty - an exciting and challenging period.

Then I applied for my current job as a complete change - although I'm still dealing with many of same issues, such as climate change, economic co-operation, classic foreign policy issues plus trade and investment.

Argentina is a vast and fascinating country with everything from sub-tropical rainforest in the North, to glaciers in the South.

Buenos Aires itself is an extraordinarily cosmopolitan and vibrant capital - it's not surprising we had around 58,000 British visitors last year.

But the Welsh community in Patagonia is special. I'll never forget walking into a chapel in Trelew to find a group of ladies chatting away in Welsh as they arranged the flowers. Or the Welsh tea and community singing they laid on for me in Esquel.

In Trevelin I went round the very moving museum of Welsh settlers' life, which included a huge steam engine of the sort my father remembers from his days on the farm in Mydroilyn.

And I was particularly proud to be asked to unveil the plaque commemorating the twinning of Aberystwyth with Esquel - and later to welcome the mayor and her delegation to the British Residence in Buenos Aires, on their way down to visit Esquel.

It's wonderful to have a job that means I can make a difference for Wales - over the four years of my posting here it'll be a top priority to strengthen our cultural and commercial ties.

My next visit to Patagonia will be for their celebration in November of the day in the late 1800s when a band of Welsh pioneers discovered the fertile valley near Esquel where they later settled.

I'll join the "Rifleros" for their horseback ride to the top of the hills overlooking Cwm Hyfryd - where I'm promised a rousing performance of Mae Hen Wlad fy Nhadau, sung beneath the Welsh flag." *Shan Morgan*

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