

God Bless the NHS!

Back in May last year, after Michael Sheen's speech;
NHS Celebrations seemed just within reach.
And now, a year on, having crossed this great land;
What has become clear; what we can all understand,
Is that events like these require effort and skill;
A pinch of inspiration; a big dash of good will.
So to all those who participated in ways great or small,
We must say 'diolch yn fawr' – huge thanks go to you all.

On Saturday we drove up from Ponty to Rhyl;
At Saint Asaph Cathedral, we prayed for the ill.
We visited Glan Clwyd, ate chips near the bay
And then met our kind hosts, the first on the Way.

The next day at Horeb, we gathered together.
We ate, sang and prayed; we frowned at the weather.
Then David, a doctor, who's known Bethan a while;
Led us on our way; walked more than one extra mile.

The sun, it was fierce; the path, it was long.
So approaching day's end, we burst into song.
Then the righteous of Ruthin, they spoilt us walkers,
As we bathed in their welcome; soon learnt they're good talkers!

Breakfast with others churches followed a restful night.

And as all good disciples, they passed on the light.

Over aqueducts, through tunnels, we trundled that day.

And passed into England with a 'boo' and 'hooray'!

So to Oswestry, where Alan welcomed us in,

And his home brewed beer gave Bethan reason to grin.

We were treated, by Churches Together, to dinner.

And the curry we went for...boy, that was a winner!

Day four we met Naomi, Communications Queen

Who glows with positivity and loves Bruce Springsteen.

With Nick, she took us to meet the ward staff,

Who spoke of their work with great pride and a laugh.

After this visit, joy-filled, we kept going,

The Dyke, it kept rising; the sun it kept glowing.

That day was a slog – we both hobbled for miles;

And Bethan rediscovered her hatred for styles.

But then – on the horizon – a shadow...something scary?!

No, a helper from God – the Reverend Mary.

Just as we were wilting, and starting to crack;

She told us home was near and could she take a rucksack?

So we headed to Chez Turnock; then there were well fed.

And following some chat, we all headed to bed.

Next day, after chapel, we waved all farewell.

And aimed for Presteigne, via Knighton, as well.

It was here, post-visit from our French Support Corps,

That the walking team soared, from two to, well, four!

At day's end a banquet and church crowd awaited us.
And – for some present – the football deflated us.
But we weren't down for long, for that very next morning,
Amidst World Cup blues, after stretching and yawning,
As a brief burst of rain gave way to dawn chorus;
The biggest of breakfasts was laid down before us!
Prayers were then prayed in the church for a while,
As new friends said goodbye with a hug and a smile.

Day six and Glasbury was our distant destination,
Knowing nothing of the lodging that would cause a sensation;
For this night, after welcome from Kathy and Clive,
Kathy took us all for a short country drive.
We imagined a shed in the woods, bare but nice.
What we got was astounding – a small taste of paradise!

Having slept so deeply in log cabin heaven,
We had eggs for breakfast, fuelling up for day seven.
First stop was the Memorial Hospital in Brecon,
Where a long photo shoot with several poses did beckon!
Meeting nurses working there was heartening – moving even;
As they spoke highly of the hospital and a team they could believe in.
Special praise went to Gemma - who supported us too -
For her baking and care for the whole Brecon crew!

No cake for *us* there, but at Talybont – tea!
As we caught up with friends and were filmed for S4C.
Up, through the Beacons, we then ascended with elation
And awaited our lift at Torpantau railway station.
The Brecon Mountain Railway staff were so very kind
To give us free tickets; to help us unwind.
So we took many photos of us and their team.
Whilst friends from the church bought us each an ice cream.

To Merthyr, to Prince Charles, we all headed then,
Hearing stories of hospital heroics again.
One nurse there told us it had been a tough day.
She thanked us for chocolates and re-entered the fray.

Friday night in Ystrad saw a Love Island tutorial
The next day began at the Nye Bevan Memorial.
More walkers and supporters joined us by the stones,
Bringing with them, fresh feet, wise heads and old bones!
We marched through Tredegar where Bevan's vision was inspired
By the community's compassion and care he admired.
May his passion for justice and equality rise again,
Across these fine isles – town and country, hill and glen.

Passing through Merthyr, our company swelled,
Some joked of our looks and the fact that we smelled!
But we took it in jest as Ponty came close
And Bethan battled bravely with her blistered old toes.

That night, in our church, a standing ovation
For the walkers who trekked across Bevan's great nation.
But the Tregedar Town Band were the ones to applaud,
For soul-stirring music so loved and adored.

Sunday brought rest...well, for most of us lot,
The exception was Bethan – onwards did she trot.
In our worship we thanked God for 70 years
Of kindness and healing, of blood, sweat and tears.

On Monday we focused on primary care,
And were wowed by the staff dedication seen there.
The evening brought a different tone, talk negative and sour
But that's more than enough about recording 'The Hour'.

On Tuesday – the big one – the Senedd in sight,
Just one final walk with quads sore and calves tight.
By Bevan's statue in Queens Street some twenty were ready,
To walk to the Bay, pace gentle but steady.

There, as expected, the Tenovus choir
Were lifting crowd spirits ever higher and higher.
Some schoolkids turned up and joined in the throng,
They were naturals on stage, started singing along.
Mick Antoniwi came out, then Vaughan Gething as well
And we each gave a speech saying - 'please go and tell
Of your thanks for the doctors, your love of the nurses,
How healthcare should not be dependent on purses
Or wallets or figures in a bank account;

For our true value's not about the amount
Of money we earn; but instead right from birth,
We're all children of God, have inherent great worth.
Whilst our care for the ill shows who we are as a nation,
So woe betide those who breathe denigration
On our NHS, on its wonderful workers.
Or who call those in need 'lazy leeches and shirkers'.
We're better than that. We're stronger together.
And in spite of their lies we'll stay strong and we'll weather
The storm of austerity, apathy, greed.
We'll keep helping each other and all those in need.
We'll fight calls for dismantling our beloved institution
We'll respond to their cruelty with a love revolution
So we'll plan a party; put on finest dress,
As we celebrate the birth of our great NHS'.

Or something like that – I can't quite remember.
But we all spoke in unison – church minister, assembly member.

And that was the last of the tentpole events
Though this week you'll find us amongst stalls and tents
At the Royal Welsh show and there's much more to come
But for now I must thank you for all that you've done –

For supporters and the steering group, for walkers and drivers;
For the churches and hosts; bed and breakfast providers;
For the craft and chat ladies; the artist, the knitter;
For the media team on facebook and twitter;
For the furniture movers; the Soroptomist gals;
For route-mappers who led us along paths and canals;

For the band, politicians; Tuesday kids' club, Sunday preachers;

For the primary school concert – the pupils, the teachers;

The stewards, the parents, the carers, the poet;

But the biggest of thanks, and – don't you just know it –

Must go to the heroes who look after our health;

Who care for us all – regardless of wealth.

Who tend to our wounds; heal both body and mind;

Who see beauty and brokenness in all humankind.

As Christians we believe the Divine Healer works through you;

And pray that God gives strength, rest, hope and grace to you.

But let's not get hung up by things of theology;

Rather let's jump straight back into biology.

We're so very grateful for all that you do;

And want to remind others of your brilliance too.

So thank you, diolch, merci and shukran.

You're angels all – every woman, every man;

Every *single* staff member of our great NHS –

You're appreciated; you're amazing; Huge love and God bless!