

CARDIFF CONFERENCE

...a personal perspective from the Hotel Advisor, Peter Rand, Kenilworth Circle

Cardiff, at last...Province 12 first invited me to view the facilities in Cardiff in 1977, when they were 'bidding' for the 1980 Annual Conference. The facilities were just not available to meet our requirements and in 1980 and again in 1994, the host City for Province 12 was Bristol.

With the refurbishment of the City Hall, the opening of the Hilton and the revitalisation of the City, Director, John Hall, convinced us all to bring the first Annual Conference of the Association to Wales. Despite some torrential rain and a fire closing one of the main hotels, the better than expected attendance produced many positive responses from those of you who completed the Conference Questionnaire.

This was a tribute to the local liaison committee with whom I worked closely for a couple of years, to the diligence of the team at Head Office and the Honorary Ticket Secretaries, Brian and Marie Taylor. 23 years on and their administration of the tickets continues to achieve the highest rating of the whole weekend.

The Website...disappointing that only 18% viewed the Conference website but, with a brand new Association website, this will be a focus for communicating details of the Manchester Conference over the next nine months.

The Civic Reception....what an inspirational choice by John Hall to

engage the Penderis Male Voice Choir. Space and fire regulations required us to run the event on two levels. Brothers had previously asked that first timers and international brothers be recognised and Grand Council have been keen to meet them. There is no "us and them" Civic Reception as some appear to believe! The evening was not helped by the 30 minutes delay in the arrival of the Lord Mayor, but the general view is the "Penderis" made up for everything.

Saturday Morning Conference...an unusually low rating for the content but the argument rages between the attractions of a keynote speaker, debates and motions. There can only be motions if they are put forward for consideration and only the best keynote speakers will be invited.

Saturday Evening Functions...there is no doubt that a combination of the capacity, higher than anticipated numbers (resulting in smaller dance floors) and the bands not living up to their billing, had an adverse impact on each event. Moving the banquet out of the headquarters hotel for the first time, to enable Cardiff to be selected, turned out to be right, with the facilities and service at City Hall out-performing Holland House and even the Hilton. A high rating for food at the Welsh night and the speeches at the banquet were other highlights of Saturday night.

Mass... if a sufficiently large church is not available, a wonderful concert hall like St David's is the next best facility with

everyone having good sight of the sanctuary. Logistically, it was a nightmare and hours of planning for both the service and the stewarding paid off in full. Unfortunately, even a 5/7 minute walk back to the hotels after Mass proved an ordeal in the monsoon conditions. Restricted access made the provision of coaches impractical, other than to the more distant hotels.

Conference Hotels...well the Hilton was the star, achieving 90% ratings from brothers and ladies in every aspect except the public areas, where the restrictions of a converted office building were hard to cover up. Only the Angel let us down plus Holland House with its poor briefing of the reception staff on the quoted prices. The booking forms for Manchester will be even clearer to avoid misunderstandings. Many hotels achieved excellent "value for money" ratings but the Royal could not overcome its noisy city centre location. Budget hotels continue to be requested but the take up is very low. With nearly 300 Brothers and their Ladies staying at the 5 star Hilton, it is always the most expensive hotels that fill first....but never fear... there will be an ample supply of cheaper hotels in Manchester. See you there, for my 32nd and last year!! We will make our Centenary Conference the best ever!

Peter Rand

Kenilworth Circle

Conference Hotel Advisor 1977 - 2008

Bursary Fund Committee Report to the 2007 AGM of Grand Council

by P A Martin Hon Secretary

In the year prior to the 2006 AGM of Grand Council this Committee met on four occasions, since then it has met on six.

The good news is that, as information about this charity has steadily permeated into the Catholic community, more applications have been received. In the year prior to the last AGM 287 awards were made, a total of £71,370 + A\$240, of which 149 were for junior helpers in Lourdes, since then 682 awards have been made, a total of £80,176, of which 395 were for Lourdes.

Although Grand Council was very generous in awarding the Committee £70,000 from a bequest for Lourdes, because of the large increase in these applications, there are now two categories of grant for helpers; £60 if working with HCPT and £30 if on a Diocesan Pilgrimage.

In an effort to advertise the charity and at the same time try to clarify any misconceptions about eligibility among our membership, the Committee have produced a booklet which has been distributed to every member of Grand and Provincial Councils plus three copies per Circle. Currently it is being distributed to every Catholic Secondary School and College, to

Diocesan Directors of Education and University Chaplains in every Province assuming that the Director has supplied me with that information. Unfortunately three Directors have to date not responded to my request.

The bad news is that our income has drastically decreased, partially through the demise of the affinity card, partially through confusion over Gift Aid Declarations and also knowing how to transfer those declarations supporting the Benevolent Fund to the Bursary Fund with the result that our Treasurer has had to realise investments in order to meet with the increasing cost of awards.

The Bursary Fund is one of the best ways of advertising our Association but whenever a Circle President presents an award on our behalf, it not only generates interest in the Association but also produces more applications which in turn lead to a further drain on our investments.

The Committee would therefore urgently appeal to all members of Grand Council to not only encourage members to support the charity through Gift Aid Declarations and donations but also to recommend it for consideration as a Circle President's Charity.