

THE JOURNEY: FROM THE MENAI STRAIT TO VENICE WITH SIR KYFFIN WILLIAMS RA

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Barchus Lywydd a Chadeirydd, mae'n hyfrydwch cael bod yma heno i ddweud gair am fy arwr John Kyffin Williams. Rwy'n ddiolchgar iawn am wahoddiad caredig Anrhydeddus Gymdeithas y Cymmrodorion, gwahoddiad mor briodol a ninnau ym mlwyddyn dathlu Canmlwyddiant ei eni (1918–2018).

President, Chair, what a joy it was to receive an invitation from the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion, an invitation to speak about my hero John Kyffin Williams, Sir Kyffin Williams, or Kyffin as he preferred to be called – an invitation so appropriate this particular year with Wales and the world celebrating Kyffin's centenary year (1918 – 2018) and may I thank Elinor Talfan Delaney for the kind invitation and Dr Lynn Williams for organizing the evening. Diolch yn fawr.

Sir Kyffin Williams, Royal Academician, once said,

Painting is a disease, you see, a terminal disease. You can't cure it really. If you are creative, you have to go on being creative. I'm old-fashioned enough to see something and say: 'My God, that's beautiful – I have to put it down.' If you love something, you can communicate – that's love. People who don't love anything can't communicate.

As one of Kyffin's former pupils said of his Art Master,

Kyffin painted the power, the dramatic moods, the atmosphere and the reality of the Snowdon Ranges. His home and his windows were a ringside Snowdon performance seat, looking directly up to the summits. He probably knew more about the weather and moods of the corries, ridges and crests of the Snowdon Range than any other man alive.

Born in 1918 at Llangefni Anglesey, Kyffin Williams attended school at Trearddur Bay, then at Chirk, and finally at Shrewsbury School. He originally wanted to be a farmer, and then to join the army. He was apprenticed to land agents at Pwllheli and walked and hunted in the mountains. He then joined the Welsh Fusiliers but was invalided out of the army because of his health (he suffered from Epilepsy from youth), with the words of the doctor ringing in his ears: 'Williams, as you are in fact abnormal, you had better take up art.'

He entered the Slade School of Fine Art at Oxford – the School having moved there from London because of the war – and tried for several teaching posts after leaving the Slade. At one school interview he was bitten by the headmaster's dog; at another Kyffin referred to Samuel Palmer, the famous English landscape painter, having seen his work on the wall on entering the headmaster's study. The headmaster retorted that he had never heard of the chap. Kyffin was rejected on the grounds of insufficient experience.

Kyffin moved on and was finally appointed Senior Art Master at Highgate School in London where he remained for nearly thirty years (1944–1973). At Highgate, he placed great value and emphasis on drawing skills.

In 1968/69 he had visited the Welsh Community in Patagonia to record the people and the land, returning with a treasure trove of paintings and drawings. Following his retirement from Highgate, he moved back home to Sir Fôn, to Pwllfanogl at Llanfairpwllgwyngyll. He lived and worked there until his death in 2006. Kyffin was exact in his pronunciation of Welsh place names, saying, ‘We don’t live in a moaning groaning island, we live in Ynys Môn!’, every time he heard the word *Môn* being mangled.

He loved his native island but as a child would be embarrassed at being called ‘the six *crempog* boy’. This was a reference to the visits he would make to the farms of Anglesey. During these visits he would be offered ‘crempog’ (‘pancake’) – there was a great deal of leg-pulling when he could only manage to eat six of the *crempogau*, whilst others of his family could eat twenty or twenty four! The six *crempog* boy was destined to become a National Treasure.

Kyffin Williams, teacher, author (Andrew Green, one time National Librarian of Wales was to say of Kyffin’s book *Across the Straits* that it was one of the best autobiographies ever published by a Welsh person), lecturer and art historian *par excellence*. I remember the late Marquis of Anglesey, Henry Paget, Kyffin’s landlord, telling me on one occasion that when Kyffin called at Plasnewydd, his home in Anglesey, he would often test Kyffin on his knowledge about art and artists and that he could always answer every question. I retorted, ‘And if Kyffin did not know of any given artist, he would have said so’, – there was never any pretence with John Kyffin – to which the Marquis replied, ‘He never didn’t know!’.

Kyffin Williams, landscape, portrait, and seascape painter, a brilliant painter of flowers and animals – cattle, dogs, badgers, foxes, and horses in Wales; gwanacos, horses, birds, and flowers in Patagonia. Kyffin Williams, cartoonist, Kyffin, lover of people, writer of limericks:

A funny old fellow called Sam,
Said Yes I will if I can,
If I find that I can’t
I suppose that I shan’t
A very perplexing old man.

He was a natural communicator, never condescending, a passionate advocate for the defence of tradition in art, an ambassador for the arts in Wales. He inspired and assisted his fellow artists; he helped to develop art galleries in Wales. Kyffin was one of the great benefactors of Wales with extensive gifts of his work to the National Library in my home-town of Aberystwyth (e.g. The Patagonian Collection and many hundreds of other works of art). The National Library houses the largest collection of his work in the world, also his gift of many hundreds of paintings to Oriol Môn in Llangefni, a priceless collection given by Kyffin to Wales and to his native county, his beloved Sir Fôn, where his father’s family had been members of the clergy serving their parishioners with love and care. Kyffin Williams, what a

man, a genius, although Kyffin once said whilst we were discussing ‘obsession’ in the art world, that ‘balmy’ and ‘obsession’ and ‘genius’ were close relatives!

He painted for over sixty years in spite of his epilepsy and other debilitating illnesses and when I asked him in 2004 how many paintings he had painted over the years, he immediately replied, ‘Thousands.’

Kyffin the artistic giant, patriot, and one of Wales’ great benefactors. Speaking on behalf of the Sir Kyffin Williams Trust, my fellow members and I are very proud that we are able to spearhead Kyffin’s centenary celebrations during 2018 – Kyffin, a person, an artist, so very deserving of our praise and adulation.

Kyffin passionately believed that an artist had to love his subject matter and asked how could an unmade bed or a dilapidated garden shed be called art?

During sixty years of painting, it is surprising that he found time to be Senior Art Master at Highgate here in London, to be President of the Royal Cambrian Academy on two occasions, a member of the Advisory Committee of the National Museum of Wales, Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Gwynedd, Royal Academician, Member of the Court of Governors of the National Library of Wales.

He was honoured by the University of Wales, Swansea, Bangor, and Aberystwyth, sharing the platform on one occasion with the President of the Republic of Ireland and the Aga Khan. He was awarded a Knighthood by Her Majesty the Queen (1999) and the Owain Glyndwr Award by MOMA Machynlleth for his outstanding contribution to the Arts in Wales.

Roderick Thomson, one of his former pupils at Highgate School, said of Kyffin,

By the openness of his approach and his words and actions he conveyed without didacticism the absolute necessity of truth, sincerity and integrity, values by which he steered his own life and which permeate his drawings, paintings, prints, writing and civic achievements.

And Lord Dafydd Wigley said of Kyffin in a tribute in 2012,

He was, as were his paintings, full of emotion, mood and love, love of people and the creation. He was this unusual combination as a person, so humble and yet as a professional artist bold, sure and assertive. Spending time with Kyffin was an uplifting experience with a whole gamut of feelings coming into play, humour, indignation, wonder and pure passion [...]. His bounteous gifts to the National Library are truly a priceless National Treasure.

After several escapades with Kyffin over the years, I well remember one occasion in 2002 when Kyffin agreed to draw a portrait of me for my autobiography – the final act of egotism on my part! Before we sat down in his parlour at Pwllfanog, on the shores of the Menai Strait, I had crossed the room to look in a mirror on the wall to preen myself and tidy my mop of unruly hair. Unbeknown to me, Kyffin came in behind me and immediately said, ‘Ruffle it up, it’s too tidy!’ When Kyffin stood in the elements at Nant Peris, there was nothing tidy about the

scene, there was nothing tidy about the waves crashing on the rocks at South Stack or on the sandy shore at Llanddwyn, as Kyffin transferred powerful images from nature on to his 20' x 16' sheet of paper, held firmly in his hand as he anchored himself between the rocks or planted his feet firmly on the sea shore. He continued to paint *en plein air* as long as his health allowed.

In 1991 John Kyffin had the great honour of being presented with the prestigious Medal of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion. This presentation was made to him by the late His Honour Judge Dewi Watkin Powell at the National Library in Aberystwyth. In his closing remarks, Judge Watkin Powell said of John Kyffin, 'This humble and modest man, Wales's greatest artist of the twentieth century.'

I am so glad, Cadeirydd, to be able tonight to add the words 'and of the twenty-first century', and, in the opinion of Peter Lord, art historian of the Welsh Nation, the most successful artist Wales has ever seen.

Cadeirydd, at this point I am a bit worried I have not reached Venice yet, but reach Venice I must and I will!

In 1950, John Kyffin Williams saw the remarkable city of Venice for the first time. Kyffin was thirty-two years old and he crossed the Channel also for the first time on his way to Rome, before continuing his journey to Venice.

This visit to Italy was because Kyffin, suffering from epilepsy, had been told by the medical authorities in the Midlands that he should have a complete change, that he should not work for one year, that he should have a change of surroundings.

In Serenissima, in the City of Canals, Kyffin notes that he found lodgings in a youth hostel with the strangest array of humanity – French, Yugoslavians, a man from Africa who went to bed every night with a large knife tied to his pyjama leg, a historian from Guatemala, several Americans, a perpetually drunk Englishman who complained nightly at the fug in his bedroom – a very varied company, the perfect company for Kyffin's powers of description.

Kyffin also records that he had been very happy in Venice and although, because of his epilepsy seeing the city in bright light was a problem, he was able to see the work of the artistic giants in the churches and the galleries of Venice, such as the work of Bellini in the Madonna del'Orto or the priceless collection of art at the Accademia – as Kyffin said, he came under the spell of the Venetian Art.

We must remember that by 1950 Kyffin had been at the Slade School of Fine Art, which had moved because of the War, from London to the Ashmolean at Oxford, and that he had been the Senior Art Master at Highgate School in London for approximately thirty years. At the Slade, Kyffin became an expert art historian. Kyffin studied History of Art under Professor Carl Tancred Borenius from Finland. Borenius was a prolific author and an acknowledged world expert on the Art of the Early Renaissance. His first book was based on his work for his doctorate, a study of artists in the Vincenza area, not far from Venice. Borenius was gifted and knowledgeable. It is believed that he acted as a spy for Britain during the Second World War, when he served as a diplomat for Finland. At the Slade, the students were tested – looking at slides of paintings, they had to say what the date of the painting was, to which school of painting it belonged, and who had painted it. Kyffin became an expert art historian, hence he was at home with artists such as Vecellio Tiziano (Titian, one of the disciples of Giovanni Bellini), Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto,

Giorgione, Francesco Guardi, Giovanni Bellini (there were many Bellinis!), Giovanni Antonio Canal (i.e. Canaletto) and Veronese.

Kyffin knew of their individual expertise, he knew Titian painted mainly in oil with his masterly portraits, he knew of the great detail in the paintings of Canaletto who painted *veduta* (i.e. views) with the aid of the camera obscura, very detailed correct paintings of what the artist saw, or the glory of the work of Francesco Guardi who began painting *veduta* but developed a much freer style, paintings created by quick movement of the paint brush.

The people represented in Guardi's paintings are on a small scale (e.g. paintings of seamen on the shores of the Grand Canal). It was a great wonder for many people how a spot of paint, looking at it in detail, represented nothing more than a spot or a splash of paint, but standing back from the painting, the spot of paint appeared miraculously in a human form – the skill, an artistic trick by the artist. Kyffin used to say that when the sky in Venice turned blue black and the palaces along the Grand Canal became silvery, then they would appear as they are in the paintings of Francesco Guardi, an artist that was sensitive to the landscape. Kyffin felt that it was Guardi rather than Canaletto that had captured the true spirit of Venice.

In 1975, the European Heritage year, the famous Welsh architect, Professor Dewi Prys Thomas, whose roots were deeply embedded in the Cynllwyd Valley near Llanuwchllyn on his mother's side – I offer no apology for publicising the Cynllwyd Valley since I live there! – and whose family roots were in Llanerchymedd on his father's side, said the following in his introduction to a book on Michelangelo which I wrote many years ago:

The Parthenon in Athens came about four centuries before Christ for two main reasons, the closeness of the Pendelicon Mountain and its supply of marble and the arrival of the great Sifias – in Italy behold the great marble mountains of Carrara, the perfect marble waiting for centuries for the man and his chisel, that man was Michelangelo.

And Kyffin said something very similar about Venice – I should note that in 1975 Kyffin was invited to be Chairman of the European Heritage Committee of the North Wales Association for the Arts – but as I was saying Kyffin made a fascinating observation about Venice and the development of painting. Kyffin explained how the practice of painting in oil came to Venice in about 1474; he emphasized the element of luck in this development. Venice, at this time a city which became a centre for some of the world's great painters, was a very powerful maritime city and in its shipyards were extensive supplies of canvas (i.e. the sails of the ships) – perfect for painting in oil.

Previously, wood was used for 'tempora' painting, with the white of eggs mixed with colour, painting on a relatively small scale; now, with the use of canvas, paintings on a much larger scale were made and artists used much bolder movements with their paintbrushes. I dare say that without the canvas sails of the Venetian ships, there would have been no Canaletto, no Guardi – well not as we know their work today.

As Professor Dewi Prys Thomas showed, it is essential that the basic, raw

material exists before creative individuals can harness different materials for creative purposes. But thinking of other artists who worked in Venice, Kyffin was knowledgeable about their work as well – British artists and artists from mainland Europe of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, such as Boudin, Whistler, Monet, Sickert, Bonington, Manet, Frank Brangwyn (whose mother came from Glasbury, Breconshire), Coburn (the American), without forgetting Turner, Kyffin had studied their work as well.

But as I have said, 1950 was the year of great revelations for Kyffin when he saw the work of the Venetian artistic giants. What he saw would remain on the screen of his mind for the remainder of his life. Kyffin was also knowledgeable about the history of Venice, a history written by another creative man – a very creative man from Cwm Cynllwyd, Owen Morgan Edwards of Coed y Pry Farm, who became the first Inspector of Schools for Wales and was knighted for his services. My mother, Elizabeth Meredith, also a native of Cwm Cynllwyd, remembered him well, he had a great gift of talking to children, a skill that served him well as he banished the dreaded ‘Welsh Not’ from the schools of Wales, starting in his native village of Llanuwchllyn. But Chair, before I get carried away advertising Cwm Cynllwyd, allow me to read what O. M. Edwards, the Oxford historian, said about Venice in his book *Tro yn yr Eidal* (A Visit to Italy) – a masterly and poetic description.

Before the end of the fifteenth century, Venice was at the height of her power and glory. The Old Greece and the islands of the central land was in her possession in the East and the lowlands around the mouth of the River Po with Padua and Verona firmly situated and firmly in her grasp in the West. Through bravery in war, through skilful trading and through cunning treachery, Venice became a force as powerful and as strong as France or Germany and Venice began to dream of becoming the empress of the world as Rome was once, with kings as her servants and the Pope her chaplain.

Apart from her extensive territories, her ports, her islands and lowlands, the wealth of her trade was unbelievable. The curtains of the homes of the Venetian poor were made of silk, their crockery made of silver and their decorations made of pure gold, and of its rich people, every palace along the Grand Canal were homes fit for kings. All the merchandise of the world passed through Venice and the treasures of the world remained in her vestibules.

Wool from Spanish sheep and wool from Angora goats, steel from Germany and bronze from Hungary, scents from Arabia and silk from Bengal, pepper from Eastern islands and pearls from India, African gold and cinnamon from Ceylon. You could see merchandise from every country on the Rialto and in front of St Mark’s Church.

From Denmark to the Sahara, from England to India, you could find coloured cloth and glass from Venice. Her merchants knew what to send to every country, gold chains and violin strings to France, candles to the devout Spaniards, silk gowns to the Negro and glass

decorations to the barbaric queens of the North. The name of Venice was in every country and the Venetian Lion, the Lion of Mark, stood on countless columns throughout cities.

This was the city that put art on a pedestal, it was in these circumstances that Venetian artists flourished. The great wealth of the Venetian merchants enabled individuals and institutions to commission great works of art in praise of God and, in some cases, in praise of men! It was this outburst of creativity that made Venice a cultural centre of great importance – it remains thus to this day.

One of the great adventurers of Venice was Marco Polo, one of the Polo family, he wandered in the name of the Venetian Republic as far as the Court of the great Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan. We know that Kyffin could recite Coleridge's great poem to 'Kubla Khan', a poem that he learnt at Shrewsbury School, a school that Coleridge also attended. I wish to suggest to you today that Kyffin's first visit to Venice in 1950 gave him a 'top line' for a long and distinguished career as an artist, as a portrait painter, and as a landscape and seascape painter. Kyffin caught the colour of the waters of the Grand Canal to perfection. Kyffin believed that the native artists of Venice had had great influence on the development of landscape painting.

So, there he was, John Kyffin, son of Essyllt and Henry Inglis Williams, on his own, being heavily influenced by a strange exciting culture and the colour and images and the waters of the Venetian lagoon dancing in front of his eyes – but not in direct sunshine. It is not surprising that Venice was a beloved city to Kyffin. He returned many times, in 1963, in 1975, and in 1979. After his 1979 visit, he held a very successful exhibition at the Tegfryn Gallery in Porthaethwy in Menai Bridge and several of his paintings were purchased by Sir Idwal Pugh, who became the Governmental Ombudsman in Whitehall. But I know, as I am sure you do, that you can never get enough of Venetian visits – yes, the pictures are on the screen of the mind, but one must renew the experience as often as possible, so that the pictures of the city are perfectly clear, in Todd-AO, in 3D, and in smellorama.

Kyffin knew of so many aspects of Venice, he would discuss the architecture of the buildings, the work of the world-famous architect, Andrea Palladio, and the design of his great monastery San Giorgio Maggiore, a monastery painted by Kyffin. Kyffin shared with others his knowledge about the sculptures of Venice such as the great sculpture by Andrea del Verrocchio, a sculpture in bronze of the *Soldier of Fortune*, the Condottiere Bartolomeo Colleoni, proud, boastful and arrogant on his horse, and Kyffin remembered seeing riders in Patagonia, not arrogant and boastful, but proud on their smart horses.

Bartolomeo intended this sculpture of himself to perpetuate his name and wanted it situated in St Mark's Square but today this sculpture of this *Soldier of Fortune* is in one of the smaller piazzas of Venice, in spite of Bartolomeo contributing a great deal of wealth to the city. But what makes this sculpture really interesting is that it was created by Verrocchio, an artist and sculptor who worked in gold and silver who is immortalized as the first teacher of a certain Leonardo from the village of Vinci near Florence – yes, Leonardo da Vinci himself.

One of the paintings Kyffin truly appreciated and admired and often mentioned was *The Crucifixion* by Tintoretto, a painting in the Scuola di San Rocco (i.e. the

School of San Rocco), a school for the destitute and the sick in Venice – a series of powerful paintings of Biblical scenes. It has been said of this painting, ‘Surely there is not another painting in the World which reflects such humanity – There is everything in this painting.’ Certainly there is tremendous ‘mood’ in Tintoretto’s series of paintings and Kyffin admired ‘mood’ in a painting above all else. Kyffin spoke about Venetian art with great feeling, he was the art master *par excellence* sharing his knowledge with no suggestion of ‘I am knowledgeable’. Discussing art was second nature to him, taking it for granted that the person he was speaking with was equally knowledgeable. Like all good teachers, he never made you feel ‘twp’ but rather presented knowledge and information without questioning.

Having been discussing matters in the fifteenth century, with one jump to 1880 with O. M. Edwards, allow me now to leave all this – leave Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, and bring you, take you to Anglesey, to Pwllfanogll and Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, and the call and demands of the twenty-first century.

It is May 2004, 21 May to be exact. Fflic Productions – then an independent company, now part of Boom Cymru – and its go-ahead chairman and producer, Gwenda Griffith, are going to make a dream come true of taking Kyffin to Venice for a programme commissioned by BBC Cymru/Wales. The late renowned director, John Hefin, a lifelong friend, would direct the programme. I was the programme consultant, but I had a much more important job to do. I was Kyffin’s chauffeur for the journey, and later, in Kyffin’s own words, ‘his pilot’ – a most appropriate word for journeys by aeroplane and for travelling by boat on the canals of Venice.

In order to arrange the TV programme, I had excellent and inspired conversations with Kyffin on the hearth at Pwllfanogll and at the Penrhos Pub at Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, discussing the possibilities for the programme. Filming in the Cader Idris area or near the Cnicht or at South Stack in Anglesey would not be a problem. Kyffin would be free to choose the exact location for filming at all of these locations, but there was one piece of the jigsaw that was missing – this was Venice. Because of Kyffin’s failing health, would such a visit be possible? He was not certain. There was one thing I knew with certainty, if ‘no’ was Kyffin’s answer to the invitation to visit Venice, then all my PR experiences in tourism, television, and in the banking and business world would count for nothing. I might as well return to the Cynllwyd Valley and start lowering the height of Craig yr Ogof with a sugar spoon!

As Kyffin and I stared into our tomato soup at the Penrhos, with the steam from our bowls mixing mid-air with the fog of uncertainty – if you see what I mean – I stressed the importance of Venice in the BBC plans for the programme. There was a long pause before Kyffin said he was game to try it! Filming in Venice was on! Following this crucial meeting at the Penrhos, with certainty reigning, we could get on with detailed arrangements. And that is why on 22 May 2004, at the ordained time, I drove down the road to Pwllfanogll, a road full of pot holes – which Kyffin always said reminded visitors from Patagonia of their road back home! We were on our way to Venice.

I got out of the car. There was still no movement. Pwllfanogll was silent. The birds were not singing. Everything was still – there was no sound from the River Braint flowing into the Menai nearby. I prepared myself. I froze my emotions as I

had done so many times in the world of television to expect the worst possible news. Had Kyffin really changed his mind? He was not coming, had all the preparations been too much for him?

And then suddenly, as I was sinking into total despondency, the yellow, front door opened wide and there stood Kyffin with his straw hat on his head. He was carrying a grey haversack on his shoulder with a pop bottle sticking out of it full of water, not for drinking but for painting! He was also carrying an Edwardian square case wrapped in grey wrapping paper, tied together with what appeared to be binder cord – Kyffin was ready for action, he was ready for the journey! I walked towards him, greeting him warmly, saying, ‘Pnawn da Sir Williams’, which was the amusing greeting he had received from one of his neighbours after receiving his knighthood! During those moments at Pwllfanogl in my state of ecstasy at seeing Kyffin, I imagined the palazzos of the Grand Canal rising up like ghosts along the shores of the Menai Strait, accompanied by Bob Roberts Tai’r Felin, Pavarotti, Jose Carreras, Tom Gwanas, Wil Tan, Welsh Whisperer and MC Mabon, all singing ‘Molianwn oll yn llon’ in one majestic chorus. In those precious moments, I knew all was well, that this would be a moment to remember. We jumped into the BMW all set for the journey to Manchester, where we would stay the night before leaving the following morning for Venice, for an adventure of a lifetime.

At Pwllfanogl, Kyffin had returned my greetings of ‘Sir Williams’ with a smile and then pointing to his trousers, he enquired if they were alright, explaining that he had spilled some white paint on them, but he had painted the white spots with a black felt pen. I immediately said that he had done a real Saville Row job on his trousers and that they were ‘ardderchog’ – excellent! If this was the price that we had to pay for taking Sir Kyffin to Venice, then so be it!

Soon after we arrived on the motorway, I learnt that Kyffin enjoyed travelling at speed. We arrived at Wilmslow in time for a late tea. The following morning, we got up early and took a taxi to the airport, where a British Airways flight awaited us, and, when Kyffin asked me, as we sat in the comfort of the plane, ‘Is this first class?’, I could reply with alacrity, ‘Of course, for you only the best.’

We had a trouble-free journey, drank a lot of tea and tomato juice and put the world to rest. As we flew over the Alps, Kyffin wondered how on earth the early cartographers had mapped the sea of white underneath us, doing so before the age of flight. We discussed the Dolomites, the valley of the River Po, and the glory of Venice in the age of Tintoretto and Titian. I was a very willing pupil in an art class in the sky.

When we arrived at Marco Polo Airport, Gwenda Griffith the producer and the organizer of the production, together with John Hefin, the director, were there to welcome us. As Kyffin and I walked through the final gate with the film crew who were on the same flight, Gwenda and John witnessed the same scene that I had seen at Pwllfanogl – Kyffin with his unique bag and his haversack with the water bottle sticking out of an old grey khaki haversack that also held all his paint.

But Gwenda and John also saw my bag, a large plastic bag with the word Euronics on its sides, advertising a Bala electrical shop! If the producer and director had expected to see Versace or Armani bags, then they were disappointed, but there was no cause for disappointment, the hero, the maestro, was on terra firma in Venice, Kyffin had come prepared to draw and to paint!

Leaving the airport, a private motorboat had been arranged to take us all to one of the best hotels in Venice, The Danieli, around the corner from St Mark's Square and not far from the mouth of the Grand Canal and within a stone's throw from the Doges Palace. A suitable hotel for Wales' greatest artist. Entering the hotel by the water entrance, we were served with a very welcome pot of tea.

But before we had entered the hotel, whilst still in the motorboat, Kyffin and I received very serious news. It had not been possible to arrange insurance cover for Kyffin because of his age, he was eighty-six years old, and cover had not been possible for me because of my hip operation. We both received this grave news in total silence, but the look we gave one another said it all: 'Who cares, we are in Venice, the Danieli is welcoming us, we have made it!' We also took comfort that there would not be any guests in the Danieli sleeping with knives tied to a pyjama leg! Well, this was our hope!

Such was my relief that Kyffin had arrived safely and that he was well, on entering my hotel room, I fell asleep on the massive bed. But, typical of Kyffin, he was out immediately sketching along the shores of the Venice basin. He was in Venice to work, to carry out his duty to the producer and the director, with the Church of Santa Maria della Salute on his right, Palladio's San Giorgio Maggiore straight in front of him and the waters of the lagoon at his feet. Kyffin was at home, after all had not one of his forefathers, one of the powerful Treffos family of Llansadwrn, purchased a house in Venice and in Berkeley Square, London, had not 'Twm Chware Teg', Thomas Williams of Treffos developed the Mynydd Parys copper mine into the biggest of its kind in the world, a company that morphed into the modern ICI?

Amongst the glorious art produced by Kyffin during his stay in Venice was his painting of San Salute, a scene painted from the shore of the Grand Canal, and also a painting of San Salute from the Accademia Bridge. He also made a preparatory drawing of the Grand Canal, completing it in oil in his studio. This was his only oil painting of the visit and one of his last paintings. Sadly, painting in oil became impossible for him, at one point he was too weak to sign his name, but could still paint in watercolour.

Jan Morris mentioned this unique oil painting of Venice in her lecture to the Sir Kyffin Williams Trust in 2011:

This remarkable picture of Kyffin's. It is a deadpan kind of picture, the canal looks as though it might be frozen, and the sparse traffic on it – a solitary gondola, a couple of undetermined skiffs, seem motionless. The sky is dark, rather surly kind of blue, the water, though not rough seems oddly perturbed, just as it does in some of his Welsh seascapes. The majestic avenues of palaces looks utterly lifeless. This picture is entirely Kyffin. Well, studying this beautiful and unusual thing, combining as it were the personalities of visionary artist and legendary place, makes me think once more about contacts between people and cities.

Kyffin worked diligently in Venice but time was found to have supper with us all as a film crew, an excellent opportunity for Kyffin to amuse us all with his memorable limericks:

There was an old man from Sir Fôn,
 Who wished he had never been born,
 On the island they said
 He was quite off his head
 That's why he was looking forlorn.
 or
 They said that enough was enough,
 The output of work by old Kyff,
 So they finally put strictures
 On his output of pictures,
 So the output of Kyffin was nothing.

This memorable visit to Venice was the central part of the television programme 'Reflections in a Gondola', a programme on the theme of 'Four Fortuitous Moments in my Life'. Kyffin began by choosing Anglesey as his place of birth. Then the life-changing moment whilst at the Slade in Oxford, when he saw a photograph of the fresco *The Resurrection* by Piero della Francesca and realized – it dawned on him – that art was not just putting things down on canvas or paper, but that love and mood was a vital part of the process – a stunning realization.

He also chose the moment when painting on Cader Idris in 1947. After a hard day's work, he thought perhaps, perhaps he could earn a living by painting. And for the fourth 'fortuitous moment' he chose Venice – he chose to visit Venice realizing that this would be his last visit because of his terminal cancer.

After our return home to Wales, the programme 'Reflections in a Gondola' was shown on the BBC with great success. Kyffin performed with such excellence on camera in Anglesey, near Cader Idris in Eryri, in Llanfrothen where he painted *Y Cnicht* and, as I have reported, in Venice itself.

Whilst staying at the Danieli Hotel, my room was next to Kyffin's room so that I could, according to the plan, lead him to the restaurant or to any meetings we would need to attend. In truth, Sir Kyffin, John Kyffin Williams, Kyffin, needed no escort, he was awake before us all, he was alert and great company.

In 2006, I published my book *Kyffin in Venice*, and in 2013 curated an exhibition "'Drawn to the Light": Kyffin Williams and Venice', with a booklet to accompany the exhibition at Oriel Kyffin Williams in Oriel Môn in Llangefni. And every time I visit Venice – which is as often as I can – I try to relive those sacred minutes I spent with John Kyffin in the city of Guardi and Titian.

And if I may, I leave you tonight with the words of Welsh artist Gareth Parry:

Kyffin Williams, contrary to popular belief that he was a dark and sombre painter, was in reality a great painter of light. His beautiful subtle umbers and greys emphasised the light that suffuses his paintings. You could say that Kyffin brought some of the Venetian light home to Wales.

Diolch yn fawr.

Thank you.