

BARMOUTH



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Newsletter



Spring 2014

Tribute to Rachel Cleaver

I met Rachel when Barmouth U3A started up in 2006, one evening the phone rang and thinking it was my daughter also called Rachel I answered with "hello Rachel" there was a gasp at the end of the line and a voice said "How did you know it was me"? Not a voice I recognised so I replied "Oh I'm psychic" and this saw the start of our warm friendship.

She was ringing to invite me to the first group meeting of the not yet formed Barmouth U3A, a book reading group. The three members Rachel, Colin Havercroft and I met the following week at Rachel's house and from then on this was the home of the group where we met monthly up to earlier this year. We did discuss the books but there was also much laughter and always a great supply of quality biscuits and a warm welcome.

Rachel soon became a committee member, an enthusiastic bridge learner, member of the walking and strolling groups and a stalwart supporter of the monthly meetings. She was never one to do things by halves, all this alongside her involvement of the W.I. National Trust, Barmouth Literary and Debating Society

and Barmouth Bowling Club. She was able to combine all these interests with their competing demands with her great love and dedication to her son and daughter and three grandchildren.

Full of fun she somehow inveigled me into performing at the U3A Christmas parties, yes it was her idea that we first sang "Nobody Loves A Fairy When She's Forty" I'd never heard it before! We had a lot of fun rehearsing, although those witnessing it might not have realise how much time we had spent on it! When I jokingly suggested that we did our last offering in top hats, black tights and leotards she didn't blink an eye but said that she could easily put together the outfit and would help me to do the same.

Her sense of fun didn't hide her shrewdness in her dealings with people and her humanity in her kindness to all and her gift of friendship which she offered so wholeheartedly and without seeking anything in return.

There are some people we encounter in life who by their qualities bring out the best in others, Rachel was one of these rare people and I, for one, will always treasure the friendship I enjoyed with her.

Rachel in her final illness was stoical and uncomplaining, hiding the severity of it from most of her friends, this I feel was so that she could continue to enjoy the friendship as it was and not letting the condition overshadow the conversation.

She will be missed by many and remembered with love.

Evelyn Richardson



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A message from Alan Vincent

Spring 2014, and we reach the end of my second year as Chairman. Again our numbers have increased over the last year and we reached a new high, with a total of 118 members at the end of March. All active groups appear to have seen an increase in attendance and I hope that our latest venture achieves the same success.

This new group, which depending on when you read this, is about to start or has already had one session, is a film group dedicated to showing older (Silver Screen) films that I'm sure we will all enjoy seeing again. The first film will be Casablanca; as group leader this is my choice, and is one of my all-time favourites. Those attending will get to tell us their own choices and we will collate the results and show the films most asked for. Look out for our second choice in the May diary.

Hopefully everybody has remembered, but just in case, can I remind you that April is the start of our Membership year, when subscriptions are due, so if you have not renewed please do so as soon as possible. Still only £10!

'I read an article the other day about digital inclusion which reported the fact that the government expected 80% of its transactions with the public to be completed on-line by 2017. It interested me, in that our own membership, which I think is a good cross section of the population, has only a 67% on-line element. It seems to me that the government has its work cut out, not just to persuade people to use on-line services but also to get them connected in the first place.

For me they should focus on mobile phone signals – then I could use my phone at home!'

The paragraph above is reproduced from my piece of 12 months ago. I refer back to it because it is interesting to note that things have hardly changed in 12 months. Our own little sample of membership has moved up to 69% on line – so if we assume we are typical as a group, we will not reach the 80% until 2020, a bit behind the governments' expectation!

12 months ago I suggested they should focus on the mobile phone signals – I still think this is the

priority – again this year no signal at home since mid-January!

Our May meeting will also be our AGM. As with all similar organisations things only happen because someone puts in a bit of effort to make it happen and the committee is the support structure for all the groups and activities. There will be at least a couple of vacancies on the committee to be filled so if you feel you would like to contribute please do not feel shy about putting your name forward. You don't get thrown in at the deep end, help and advice is readily available from the existing team and new committee members will, I feel find it a relatively smooth introduction. We only have a meeting every two months, so the commitment is not too onerous.

We all know that Barmouth and the Mawddach is a wonderful place for walking and now it appears that other U3A groups are beginning to understand that as well. We are aware that groups from Penmaenmawr and from Devizes are visiting Barmouth for a walking break over the next couple of months.

In both cases members of the committee are meeting them on their first evening in town and as a sort of "Welcome to Barmouth" session we are going to show them George's video "*Journey down the Mawddach*" to introduce them to the beauty and history of our area.

If these groups spread the word, then we will, in a small way, be contributing to growing tourism in our town.

STROLLERS' GROUP

From: Patricia Percival, Strollers' Group co-ordinator

JANUARY - LLANFAIR TO HARLECH.

The proposed January Strollers' walk at Pwllheli, with a visit to the newly opened Wetherspoon's pub, was postponed because of storm damage to the railway line.

In its place, for the first walk of the New Year, we had a pleasant walk from Llanfair to Harlech mainly on tarmac roads to avoid the very muddy footpaths at this time of the year. This proved very popular with the sixteen Strollers (plus Patch the dog) joining us for the walk.



Most of us met on the number 38 bus from Barmouth, getting off at Llanfair where we joined up with several others. From Llanfair we walked the top road, a cycle route to Harlech, taking in the wonderful distant views over the Llyn Peninsula, and stopping to take a closer look at the Baptist Well built in 1841.

Once in Harlech we continued past a house with a duck pond in the garden and through the park with its stream and bridge. On the walk back down we passed the house which is known as *the smallest house in Harlech*, currently for sale, arriving at Harlech Swimming Pool for lunch.



The staff at Harlech Pool Restaurant were rather overwhelmed to find 16 customers appearing at once but coped very well and were pleased at our support in their campaign to keep the pool open. After an enjoyable leisurely lunch we left to catch the 2-30pm bus home.

FEBRUARY - BONTDDU GOLD MINE

It just shows - you can never trust the weather forecast. In a week of dreadful weather the forecast for our February Stroll was poor, but we went ahead and enjoyed a pleasant stroll to the Gold Mines above Bontddu. We didn't get

wet and the sun shone for most of the walk, although Cader Idris and the surrounding hills were covered in snow.

Starting from the 'Old Post Office' at Bontddu, we followed the river and its waterfalls, spectacular to see after the recent rain, until we came to the Clogau Mine, famous for the supply of Welsh Gold to The Royal Family.

The entrance to the mine was gated so we couldn't explore further, although we did look through the spoil heap for any gold left behind. (I'm sure what we found was only fool's gold!)



We walked on to the mine workings with further spoil heaps. Finding a sheltered spot next to another mine entrance, we stopped for our lunch break, with distant views of the Mawddach Estuary. This mine entrance wasn't gated, allowing limited exploration with the aid of Lindsay's torch.



After lunch we followed the old rail track, passing yet another mine entrance, until we met up with the road heading down towards Bontddu. A footpath to the right, past several cottages, brought us back to the river which we followed back to our cars, all

agreeing that it had been good to get out and walk again after the recent terrible weather.

MARCH IN THE HILLS.

It was a lovely day for our (rather more strenuous!) March walk in the hills above Barmouth, taking in the ruins of Gellfechan Farm House and the Television mast.

We started up the seventy steps by the side of St Tudwal's Catholic Church in Barmouth leading onto Gellfechan Road where a further stroller joined us as we passed her home.



Continuing past two old mine workings, we joined the footpath leading to the ruins of Gellfechan. On reaching the ruined farmhouse, we stopped for a while to explore the buildings and hear Lindsay read the most interesting history of the property, from the book 'Gellfechan and its Last Family' by Carol Skelton. The house was used as a Bed and Breakfast in the 1950s; visitors arriving by train at Barmouth being transported up by pony and trap!



After taking in the fantastic views we continued up to our next stop at Gellfawr holiday cottage. In the garden we found a cast-iron wheel which was pulled round by horses to grind flour. We also noted

what we thought were two interesting underground cold stores a short distance from the house.

Continuing upwards we reached the high point of our walk, overlooking the television mast and the Mawddach Estuary. We found a sheltered spot to sit while we had our lunch - and to recover from the two hours of upward climb!



After lunch we followed the path down past the television mast until we joined up with Panorama Road where a lazy grass snake crossing the road entertained us for a while. A short distance down the road we took a footpath to the right past several cottages. This led us back into Barmouth finishing with 127 steps down into the town.

A coffee at Davy Jones Locker on the Harbour, sitting out in the lovely sunshine, brought an end to a very pleasant day.



U3A WALKING GROUP

From: Norma Stockford

JANUARY – PRECIPICE WALK

Nine hardy members (and two very well-behaved dogs) met at the Nannau Estate Car Park on a cold Monday for our January walk. This walk replaced Peter's original plan to take the train to Llwyngwril and walk back to Barmouth, postponed because of the closure of the train line during the stormy weather earlier in the month.

The Precipice Walk does not follow a public footpath but a private walk over a particularly beautiful part of the Nannau estate, which dates back to the twelfth century. The public have been invited to use this walk by the estate since 1890 on the understanding that they observe the country code, follow the route indicated and use the proper access.

The forecast was for showers, getting colder, so we were all suitably dressed and set off on the circular walk. It was very wet and slippery in places (as of one or two walkers found to their cost) and we were denied the usually stunning views down the Mawddach, Snowdon, Cader Idris and surrounding mountains. We did see the smallest blue patch of sky, but this was only to last for a few seconds before the rain and (very painful) hail stones descended.

After following the narrow path of the precipice walk, we returned via the beautiful Llyn Cynwch where the weak winter sun tried to shine through the cloud and mist.



On the other side of the lake lies the ancient mansion of Nannau estate. I have since discovered that the present house, built in 1796 was the house of Vaughan family who owned most of the land in

the area. It is at least the fifth house to be known as Nannau, one having been built by Owain Glyndwr in 1404.

This was a short 3.8 mile walk which, because it was too cold and wet to stop, took only 2 hours, but at least we all got out and enjoyed the good company!

MARCH - TRAILS AROUND LLANBEDR

Ian had kindly said he would arrange our March walk and what a good turnout there was on Monday 24th when 16 of us turned up at his house.

Dolmygliw farm is tucked away in the woods behind Llanbedr and Ian and his wife were ready and waiting for us at 11 am. We set off on a gentle ascent through Coed Aber Artro in pleasant spring sunshine, passing the Afon Cwmnantcol reservoir dam and following part of the Taith Ardudwy before stopping at the stagecoach bridge Pont Penybont for lunch. Resuming our walk on country tracks, we came across a sheep semi-submerged in a bog. It appeared to be trying to free itself but seemed well and truly stuck. None of us could reach the animal so a couple went back to a nearby farmhouse where the farmer thanked us for letting him know. However, he seemed unperturbed, adding 'Oh she's always doing that, she does it every day, she'll get out by herself!'

We followed paths towards Wern Gron, and returned through the oak woodlands of Coed Llety Walter Nature Reserve. Otters are known to venture into the wood from nearby river Artro and both lesser and great spotted woodpeckers are sometimes seen here. The paths underfoot were surprisingly dry, making a change from our previous wet and soggy walks earlier this year. Plenty of snowdrops and primroses were spotted, but we were a little too early for the bluebells which will be glorious in a few weeks' time.

We made our way through Pentre Gwynfryn back to Dolmygliw where we were provided with a very welcome cup of tea and a chance to sample Ian's delicious home-baked biscuits. Our walks are always enjoyable, and this was a delightful four and a half miles through the most glorious woodlands, in pleasant company. And all in dry weather! I managed to get back to Barmouth just before the first spots of rain arrived at 3 pm.

MONTHLY GATHERINGS.

From: Evelyn Richardson

After the fun and games of the biggest Christmas party yet, January saw us hosting the Inter-Society Quiz with representatives from several groups that function within Barmouth, and very pleasant it was as well. The quiz questions were pitched at the right level and the general running of the meeting was left in the very able hands of Jacqui and John Puddle so a big *THANKYOU* to them.

There was a new occurrence in February; for the first time in Barmouth U3A's history we had to cancel a session due to extreme weather conditions. Alan valiantly turned up just in case we weren't able to contact everyone. A lot of emails and phone calls were made and I was left with a batch of homemade biscuits which Jack and I had to consume! We hope to hear Bronwen's talk early in the Autumn.

The March meeting went ahead as usual and we had an excellent presentation from Paul Kay of the Marine Conservation Society. Paul gave a beautifully illustrated talk on the Welsh coastline, and the multiplicity of wild life to be found in and around our shores. It was a thought provoking talk and may prompt us to organise a beach clean in Barmouth later in the year.

On a personal note I am hoping to hand over the running and booking of speakers to someone new after the AGM but will continue to help and support whoever that is as I have been supported in all the roles I have undertaken since the start of Barmouth U3A..... Any volunteers?

TABLE TENNIS

From: Geraldine Vincent

We are still doing well on Friday lunchtimes; with a steady group of twelve, usually about ten will turn up.

We now have our own new table, bats and balls – all stored at the Leisure Centre. This enables us to play three tables so no having to wait a turn. This we are all finding a bit difficult as there is no rest break.

Together with the equipment the grant enables us to have ten free sessions. So why not start now? It's free, no equipment needed and we will all help to get new members started.

We are a bit loud and enthusiastic. The hall echoes to our misses and our triumphs.

All in all a good hour spent – in the dry, and getting a bit fitter. The latter mainly due to having to run the length of the hall (sometimes into the croquet) to retrieve balls!

SINGING FOR FUN

From: Evelyn Richardson

Spring is a lovely time to sing, with so many songs to choose from. March saw us welcoming spring with a variety of music stretching from an early 17th century poem by *Katherine Tynan* set to music by *Hugh Robertson - All In The April Evening*, sung in two parts - through to *It Might As Well Be Spring* from *State Fair* by Rodgers and Hammerstein and *Spring! Spring! Spring!* from *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* by *Johnny Mercer* and *Gene de Paul* - one of my favourites with the wittiest lyrics I have ever heard, and biologically spot on!

The Singing for Fun Group is now into its seventh year so as well as the old favourites, there were a couple of new ones to stretch our vocal cords and learning abilities to the full. We now have about thirty regular attenders including three very brave men! Yes, men are welcome; we ladies are not so intimidating as you might think!

I am hoping to start a new SFF group in Fairbourne on similar lines to the current one. If we can get the timing right, it will run roughly about two weeks apart from the one in Barmouth. As a prelude to this we are having a SFF on the 23rd April in Fairbourne village hall at 2pm, with homemade cakes and cups of tea, all welcome. We will be singing songs from the shows and others. Watch this space.

Again my thanks are due to all the singers and especially to our pianist Martyn who takes everything I throw at him with humour and skill! All of which helps to make it a joyous afternoon of music, song and cuppas. And what will we sing in April to go with our other spring songs? *Tiptoe Through The Tulips... April Showers... or Stormy Weather?*

The Busy Bees – Needlecraft

From: Jean Wilde.



We are all still alive though our numbers have dwindled. So many members who learned to crochet now practise at home. But Wendy, who two years ago didn't even own a crochet hook, has completed a beautiful throw



If you wish to know more about cutwork, bargello, needlework, patchwork, hardanger or any other craft, come and join us. There is always someone who knows how.

Here is some more of our work:



A Sewer's Poem – by Jean Wilde.

Oh! What a joy! What a delight!
Skeins of yarn, colours bright,
Waiting to start, but not with a knot,
For someone who really loves sewing a lot,

Thread the needle, then chain,
And the pattern can start
Far better than "Valium" to quieten the heart.
For what better pill in all the world
Is a pattern and skein of yarn unfurled?

As you patchwork, or cross stitch, or hardanger too
To create a new project, to keep for you,
All tensions unwind with the silk on the ball
Who cares if you don't get to 'hoover' the hall?
Just get that work going and enjoy a good rest
Housework's a pain, even at best.
When the project is finished, be it bedspread or doll
Then you can finish the washing, and Hoover the hall.

We hope when we die, and go up above
And rest there forever, enjoying His Love,
There'll be a big box, all filled up with yarn
And a soft cloud to hold me, free from harm
We'll float there forever just stitching away
.....and give thanks for each heavenly day.



GROUP CO-ORDINATOR

From: Geraldine Vincent

At the March meeting, members were asked to make suggestions for new groups and activities. From this a Film Club is starting on the third Thursday in the month.

Other suggestions have been organised outings, walking basketball, craft work, photography, amblers - not strolling or walking! (think that would suit me), acting, writing, and Zumba gold.

During the course of the next month I will be investigating possible trainers and costs. If members wanted help in setting up their own specialist group I am happy to help, please contact me on 01341 247415 or email geraldine@t4alv.com

BOOK READING

From: Evelyn Richardson

February's choice was *The Star of the Sea* by *Joseph O'Connor*. The book is no light read but is a searing and heart rending story set in Ireland at the time of the potato famine where the lives of many have been ravaged by its aftermath. It also shows the attitudes to poverty and class which allowed such a tragedy to happen.

The title is the name of the ship which took most of the characters to America; a creaking and unwholesome vessel which seemed to have a character of its own. These were known as coffin ships due to the poor provision for practically every aspect of life, despite the efforts of the captain and crew who did their best for the passengers.

The various characters' lives have been intertwined at many stages prior to the voyage and they all, through various circumstances, are travelling to America to start a new life. The book is beautifully written, very gripping, and the plot full of vitality and humanity.

It transforms history into a story of the many facets of this troubled time in Ireland's past that impacted on the people of Ireland and why it has left such a toxic legacy even today.

The book stimulated a lively discussion amongst the book group members and I would recommend it to you all.

The Thirteenth Tale by Dianne Setterfield

Some of you may have seen the dramatization of this book over the Christmas period; I did and thoroughly enjoyed it. It didn't spoil my enjoyment of the book, a gripping tale of what could be termed a highly 'dysfunctional family' set in recent times and in the period, we think, between the two world wars.

The story could very well be described as gothic fiction, incorporating madness, incest, deceit and, to some extent, redemption. Beautifully written, I was instantly drawn into the strange and compelling tale and found the two main characters intriguing and diverse; their developing relationship and understanding of each other was sensitive and believable. It is the kind of book I will re-read and pick out passages which move me and cause me to marvel at the author's story-telling skills.

My book reading has expanded a great deal over the seven years of the book club and I have been both entertained and educated by its variety. I mentioned the group to someone recently who replied that they didn't want to be 'told what to read'! Well who does? We agree by consensus what the chosen books will be and sometimes each member will choose a book to present to the rest of the group. It's always an interesting session.

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The summer newsletter will be published for July. Please let me have your contributions by 15th June.