

BARMOUTH



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Newsletter



Winter 2013

*Winter is on my head, but eternal
spring is in my heart!*

Victor Hugo

This is the brightest quote I could find and I'm sure it is true of many of our young-at-heart members. Not many have anything positive to say about winter and I simply had to find something a bit more optimistic as our weather has been more than Fifty Shades of Grey so far this season!

But... the days are already lengthening and, as Michael Fish proved, the weathermen are not always right – we might still get a glimpse of the sun one day! I'm an optimistic pessimist!

We have had a few changes this quarter – new groups forming. For the more sprightly, Geraldine's table tennis might be worth a try. For the more sedentary, the Craft Group seems to be going well. Don't forget to let us know if you have any ideas for new groups or interests.

Editor

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A message from Alan Vincent

Well, I enjoyed the Christmas Party at the monthly meeting enormously and I am sure that all those that attended did so as well. We had a fairly eclectic selection of entertainment on offer, from a youth culture dance craze all the way through to traditional Christmas songs led by the Singing for Fun group.

My congratulations to all the people who presented, they provided great entertainment. It is not easy to stand up in front of a large group of people, as I know from personal experience, with my own attempt to put over some jokes.

Well done to all the team that put on the event, organised the entertainment, provided the entertainment, produced the food, served the members and generally contributed to a really enjoyable couple of hours.

Whilst I was thinking about this article, late as usual, I saw an item on the news last night that amazed me and led me to want to talk about it here.

I think a lot of you are aware that I spent most of my working life using new technology, in fact it is my view that our generation has seen more change, brought about by technology, in its lifetime, than any other. I often look back – there's a lot more to look back at now – and see how things have changed because of the development of technology. In fact, because I worked in an industry – film processing – that was eventually overtaken totally by technology I have always had some sense of how the Luddites might have felt.

This is somewhat disingenuous because I was one of those driving the change, but it is obvious that a number of aspects of the technological revolution have not been good for society.

However the news article restored my faith in technological development.

It concerned a lady who was totally paralysed from the neck down. She was taking part in an experiment to use "mind control" to provide movement to a robotic hand. This brave lady had sensors inserted into her brain, with terminals on top of her head connected to a computerised arm and hand. She had learnt how to use her mind to control the hand and the news article showed her controlling the hand to feed herself a piece of chocolate – something she had set herself as a target when she agreed to take part in the work.

The success did not end there, she was also able to control the hand and arm to pick up and place different shaped objects into slots, just like a young baby learns.

There is obviously a lot of work yet, the experiment was conducted in a laboratory, and the terminals on the top of her head did look a bit Frankenstein-ish, but think wireless and continuous miniaturisation and you begin to see how things could develop very quickly.

Our grandchildren will surely see this type of assistance become the norm in their lifetimes.

Whatever the problems with technology today, in my view, this type of development outweighs the negatives and justifies my support for continuous technology development.

A Happy New Year to all our readers.

BADMINTON

From: Wendy Bramley

Our numbers have varied from five to nine since our re-start after the August holiday. We still, I believe, enjoy ourselves and of course the exercise

is always good. Pauline has fully recovered from her bad back and is back on form again.

Neil has injured his knee, so is having a short, we hope, rest. Meena has had to have a couple of nasty operations and we all send our love and support to her. She's a brave and determined lady and it was so good to see her at our Christmas Lunch on 9th December. We presented her with a bouquet of flowers to help speed her recovery and sent our good wishes.

May I wish all our Badminton Group a Happy and Healthy 2013.

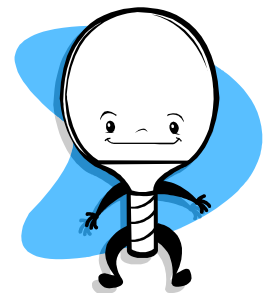


Table tennis

From: Geraldine Vincent

The Table Tennis group started in December and has been highly successful.

All the original 'tasters' have stayed and we run two tables most weeks.

We are all getting great enjoyment from this activity and one person in particular obviously had a latent ability, and is becoming a creditable opponent.

Everyone is welcome - noon in the leisure centre. We get as much exercise from hitting the balls as trying to retrieve them from far flung corners of the sports hall.

Come and have a try.

Book Reading *From: Rachel Cleaver*

Attendance for our October meeting was rather sparse, due to an operation for a new hip, a hospital appointment, and the result of an unfortunate walking incident. However, the remaining members still managed to have a lively discussion of the chosen book – ‘*Caught in the Light*’ by *Robert Goddard*, as well as the usual diversions into related subjects.

However, November produced a full complement of members. Our book – *My Son, My Son*’ by *Howard Spring*, was written in 1938. Our copies had been reprinted in 1968 and the books did look a little the worse for wear!

There were, as always, divided opinions on the merit of the book, its characters and story line. What was of interest is how the style of writing conflicted with modern day, especially the use of what would now be considered totally ‘unPC’ (politically incorrect) phrases, a term not known in Howard Spring’s time.

Our December book was ‘*The Book Thief*’ by *Markus Zusak*, set in pre-war Germany at the time the Nazis were coming into power.

The story revolves round a small girl – Leisel – who had been given away for adoption. Unable to trace her mother at a later date, one could only assume she had become a victim of the Holocaust.

Leisel’s passion for books resulted in her helping herself to any book which was readily available, regardless of the subject – hence the title.

The author describes the fears, the poverty and the extreme hardship suffered by the ordinary German people as Hitler’s power and the Nazi movement accelerated throughout the country.



SINGING FOR FUN

From: Evelyn Richardson

Singing is an ordinary activity which many people enjoy; we may sing alone or in the company of others. Even those of us who say they can't sing may do it in the privacy of their own homes.

At present there is a great deal in the media about singing due, to a large extent, to the very popular series featuring Gareth Malone and the choirs he has started. I was listening to a very interesting programme about the many health benefits singing can bring in terms of both physical and mental wellbeing. However there was one voice of disagreement, not with the actual idea of it being good for one, but that it is worthy of practise just because it is, or can be, so beautiful and that in itself is justification for doing it. This I had to agree with, and for me singing brings much pleasure. Not that I am particularly good at it, but simply for the sheer enjoyment. This set me wondering if I would do it even if it was frowned upon.

Would I hide somewhere and have a little sing, risking censure and disrepute? I have to confess that I probably would, but that it was highly unlikely to happen that such an innocent pastime could be so judged.

A few days later, listening to the radio again, I heard a report about the situation in Mali, a large country in Africa. Since parts of the country have been taken over by a fundamentalist Muslim sect, singing the traditional songs of the country has been curtailed and people can be punished for singing them. The singers have had to go underground and risk severe

punishments if caught. It made me think that we take our ordinary freedoms so lightly, expecting that we can exercise them freely whenever we wish. How fortunate we are.

So keep singing, in the morning, in the evening, when working or when relaxing. Sing whatever you want when you want and enjoy!

Happy New Year to you all!

THE STROLLERS

From: Patricia Percival

October

Due to the normal Tuesday date for the Strollers' Walk coinciding with other U3A activities, this month's walk was held on Sunday 7th October.

Taking advantage of the Sunday-only bus service from Barmouth to Caernarfon, we met up on the number two bus at various points along its route to enjoy the pleasant journey to Caernarfon. After a rather wet previous week, the Sunday turned out to be sunny with blue skies.

We got off the bus at the stop before Caernarfon where Lyndsay kindly called in at Tesco's to treat us all to a cake to eat during our walk. We then set off down Coed Helen Lane, crossing the Welsh Highland Railway Bridge, and with views of Caernarfon Castle across the fields. This led us down on to Aber Foreshore Road along the Estuary. As we passed the Swing Bridge we were entertained, while having a rest, by the swing bridge opening to allow the passage of a masted yacht. Continuing along the Estuary we found a bench, overlooking the Menai Straits and Anglesey, to eat our lunch.

After lunch we continued along the water front finally turning inland across a

football field and narrow path leading us through a caravan site to a Tower on the hill. The Tower appears to be a lookout tower, but is nothing more than a folly. It was built during the early Victorian period by the Coed Helen Estate landowner Rice Thomas Esq, as a summerhouse and now houses a mobile telephone mast. The short detour up to the Tower offered fantastic views of Caernarfon Castle and over Anglesey. We then made our way back through the park, over the swing bridge and round the town walls to Wetherspoons where we enjoyed a coffee before catching the bus home.

A most enjoyable day out.



November

The November Strollers' Walk at Criccieth proved very popular with fifteen members meeting up on the 10am train from Barmouth, the weather being dull but dry.

From Criccieth station we crossed the railway line and made our way through the park towards the water front, on our way picking up a small girl who wanted to join our party. She was quickly rescued by her mother.

We walked the coastal path to Ynysgain where the path started to deteriorate then went down on to the beach for a short drinks break. Walking along the beach

we paddled across a small stream before going back up to rejoin the coast path towards Criccieth. Here we intended taking a path inland, but due to the previous night's rain this path was too muddy to use. A slight detour along a bridleway and across fields brought us to the main road.

Crossing the road, we made our way up the hill with views over the town and distant views of Criccieth Castle and the coast. The loop brought us back into the town where we made our way to the original Cadwaladers Cafe, famous for its ice-cream, which now has branches as far afield as the Trafford Centre in Manchester. Here we enjoyed our lunch with lovely views over the bay before catching the return train back to Barmouth.

December

An early start on this sunny, cold and frosty winter's morning for the December Walk at Tywyn, meeting on the 8.45am train from Barmouth.

From Tywyn main line railway station we started the walk heading towards Talyllyn Railway Station and then down to the promenade. This led us onto the coastal path in a northerly direction, passing the fisherman's cottage where until recently fish from the morning's catch could be bought. From the end of the tarmac path we headed inland over the railway line and across the former Army Camp fields, following the wide drainage dykes and taking advantage of the frosty ground which could otherwise have been rather muddy.

Finally we came to the lane leading back into Town, coming out behind the "Magic Lantern" cinema, opposite to the White Hall Hotel where we were to have lunch.

Since we were slightly early for lunch, this allowed us time to extend the walk with a short wander around town, then back to the White Hall Hotel for lunch before catching the 1.24pm train back home.



WALKING GROUP

From: Norma Stockford and Carolyn Evans

The October walk was an old favourite to Pont-Scethin. As it was half term and I had family staying, I asked Mary if I could bring them along.

Grandchildren Charlie (8) and Anna (6) had done Cader in August so I thought they could manage an 8 mile walk. We all met at the car park at the top of Cors y Gedol Drive and set off at a brisk pace.

I love this walk to Pontscethin and the Janet Haigh path. There were one or two newish additions to the group and we had some enjoyable conversation interspersed with a bit of huffing and puffing on the steep ascent! The weather was good and the views were stunning across the Llyn Peninsula with the Irish Sea in the distant haze. I always find the Janet Haigh memorial an inspiration. It was placed here by her son, Mervyn, Bishop of

Winchester between 1942 and 1952 and who retired to North Wales. In 1953 he erected the memorial to *'the enduring memory of Janet Haigh, who even as late as her 84th birthday, despite dim sight and stiffened joints, still loved to walk this way from Talybont to Penmaenpool'*. What a remarkable woman! Little Anna had to be carried for part of the way by her mum but Charlie took it all in his stride. I doubt I'll be doing this in my 80s.

The path took us to the top of the Llawlech ridge and then down towards Bwlch y Rhiwgr, a crossing point used since Stone Age times. Once through the slippery Bwlch it was downhill all the way to Pont Fadog, another ancient bridge dated 1762. Then on past Llety Lloegr, the overnight stop for the old drovers on this road, and towards the standing stones (well, some of them are lying down) where Charlie was delighted to find a geocache.

For those uninitiated in the art of geocaching, it is a superb way to keep young children (and adults!) interested on a long walk. Geocaching is a sort of outdoor treasure hunting game using OS maps or GPS-enabled devices. Participants navigate to a specific set of GPS coordinates and then attempt to find the geocache (container) hidden at that location. Inside the container you will find a logbook, where you should enter your name and write about your find, and a few small items like keyrings and trinkets left by previous geocachers. If you take something from the geocache, you must leave something of equal or greater value. You can find out more at www.geocaching.com, it's great fun.

We were soon back at the cars and then on to coed Mawr where we all enjoyed Mary's delicious tea and cake before it was time to take a very tired Anna back for an early night.

November: Precipice Walk & Copper Mine.

The weather forecast was not good - heavy rain. (What's new?) In spite of it, several hardy souls were waiting at the car park for the Precipice Walk.

But in fact, the weather was fine and we set off, hoping the rain would keep off long enough. We were not to be disappointed.

We had all done this walk before but were enlightened by one of our members as to the naming of the walk. It was originally named in Victorian times and we all imagined Victorian ladies from towns undertaking the thrills of the walk in their Victorian dresses and shoes, when it would appear as though they were indeed on the edge of a precipice. It was suggested that we did the walk again, in Victorian dress to get the 'proper experience'!

The path down to the copper mine is marked by a sign post, and is 'stepped' down the valley. In wet weather, care must be taken on the steps as they are edged with wood and can be slippery. The path was good all the way down to a surfaced track but with no indication which way to go, left or right. We turned right and followed the track round to Glasdir Copper Mine, where there is an information board and picnic table overlooking the site of the mine. On looking down at the site, it was remarked that it looked like Machu Pichu! We made this our morning break stop and found out about the flotation method of extracting copper.

Retracing our steps up the picturesque little valley, we continued on the Precipice Walk until we reached a sheltered spot out of the chill breeze for our lunch stop. After lunch we continued via the lakeside path, wondering how

some of the trees survived with their feet in water most of the time.

On reaching the car park, everyone said they really enjoyed the walk and learnt a bit of its history at the same time. Most had never visited the copper mine and never from the Precipice Walk so we did cover new ground as well.

As we got into our cars - it started to rain!!

Well, I looked at the forecast and chickened out – sorry Carolyn. Now I wish I had been there – but without my crinoline, perhaps. Ed.

Quiz

1. What is the opening line of Shakespeare's *Richard III*?
2. Which sporting event was first held in Chamonix in France in 1924?
3. Directed and co-written by Alan Rickman, which 1997 film concerns a mother and daughter played by real-life mother and daughter Phyllida Law and Emma Thompson ?
4. Which former Premier league referee's last game before retirement was the 2004 FA Cup Final?
5. What is the official name of the amount between £100 and £300 given by the government to those born on or before 5 July 1951 to help pay heating bills?
6. What was the nickname of the conflict caused by the Soviet invasion of Finland in November 1939?
7. What seasonal name is common to entertainment venues in Blackpool, Harrogate, Margate and Morecambe, among others?
8. What are the titles of the first four concertos in Vivaldi's *The Contest Between Harmony and Invention, Op8*?
9. What term is given to the hypothetical climatic effect of nuclear war due to the potential disruption to the atmosphere this could cause?
10. Which Simon and Garfunkel song was a 1987 hit for *The Bangles*?

Answers at end of newsletter

MONTHLY GATHERINGS

From: Evelyn Richardson



We are now meeting in the Arts Room after about two years in the Parlwr Mawr, and if the numbers of those attending continue to rise it will prove to be a smart move. Hiring this room is more expensive but is more convenient and the kitchen facilities are better.

In September we had a fascinating 'stroll' through the buildings in Barmouth and the surrounding area in the company of Peter Thompson. Peter lives locally and has studied historic buildings in Wales; he is hoping to set up a Barmouth heritage group.

The quiz held in November was hastily put together by me as the scheduled speaker was unable to attend. It showed what a wide general knowledge our members have and also stimulated an offer from one of those present to organize another quiz at a later date.

The Christmas Party

It was great to see so many at the party, the largest number we have had. The main reason we moved the event to the daytime was because it clashed with a school concert being held that evening.

Another aspect was that many of our members find getting out at night more difficult with the poor public transport available. It all went with a swing and many brave souls responded to my request for turns so we had a varied and lively programme. It takes a bit of nerve to stand up and "perform" it also takes much hard work to devise quizzes. Getting the questions stimulating enough to get the grey matter functioning, but not

so hard that people feel they know nothing, and most of all making sure that the answers are correct or a riot might ensue.

A lot of effort goes into the practical side. Sorting and laying out the food, serving drinks, most of which ran reasonably smoothly. My thanks to all those who helped in any way, with particular thanks to the 'cleaners-up' at the end. There must have been about 100 plates to wash and dry and all the cups and glasses.

Many thanks also to those who donated raffle prizes and to Sue who managed it, making £91 which goes towards supporting the Singing for Fun group. Most of the food was given and prepared by the committee members so again, a big thank you to you all.

I was very impressed with the singing. Some of you men should join us on a Wednesday afternoon - you were magnificent!! All the effort was worthwhile and it was a most enjoyable afternoon.

I hope that the topics and activities so far have provided enough interest to the members as we try to vary the sessions so that at the diverse interests of the membership are catered for. If anyone has ideas for speakers or activities please get in touch with me either by telephone or email so we can discuss them and perhaps include them at a later date.

Appeal for Stories for BBC Series on Wales in the 1960s

Testimony Films is producing a new four part series for BBC1 Wales on life in Wales during the 1960s. They are keen on speaking to people who lived in Wales in the 1960s and have experiences and stories to share. The four part series will explore the dramatic changes that took place in Wales in the 1960s to transport,

education, industry and the effect of the sexual and social revolution.

If you or someone you know have memories of life in Wales in the 1960s or would like more information on the series, you can contact Emily Sivyer on 0117 925 8589, emily.sivyer@testimonyfilms.com or at Testimony Films, 12 Great George Street, Bristol, BS1 5RH.

WRITING GROUP

From: Norma Stockford

Because of declining numbers in the group due to a variety of reasons, the Writing Group has disbanded for the meantime.

If any other members out there would like to join and increase the membership, we could consider re-forming in 2013.

Would you like to write your memoirs? Poetry? A play? A blockbuster? Just let me know

(The previous item has just given me some new inspiration - I think I'll start on 'Life in Barmouth in the 1960s'... On second thoughts, do I really want you all to know what I got up to then?)

Answers to Quiz

1. 'Now is the winter of our discontent'
2. The Winter Olympics
3. The Winter Guest
4. Jeff Winter
5. Winter Fuel Payment
6. The Winter War
7. Winter Gardens
8. Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter (collectively called the Four Seasons)
9. Nuclear winter
10. Hazy Shade of Winter. (*No I haven't heard of it either!*)

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