

BARMOUTH



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Newsletter



Winter 2014



Well, I haven't seen the quayside flooded since Christmas 1975 when I lived next-door to the Last Inn. My youngest was six weeks old at the time and it was not much fun washing by hand for a family of five for several weeks afterwards!

I feel for all those affected by the floods all around the country, it is a horrid experience. On the plus side, it is amazing how people rally round to help in a small community.

Let's hope we have a good summer season after all this.

Norma Stockford, Editor

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A message from Alan Vincent

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and are enjoying a Happy New Year – despite all efforts of the weather systems that have ravaged our coast over the last few days.

I really enjoyed the Christmas Party – many thanks to all the members who put in the effort to ensure that we all had a great time.

I was pleased to see that Barmouth U3A was mentioned in the Mayor's, Sue Slater, Christmas message as one of the groups who are helping to make our community a thriving and safe place to live. It is gratifying that our contribution, as volunteers and supporters of the various projects and activities has been recognised.

Finally a little tale of success: Geraldine and I operate an electronic diary which we each can update directly. When checking the date of a football game – if you didn't already know I support Chester FC and attend all their home games – I noticed that on one of the Saturdays in February a home game entry had, unknown to me, been overlaid with a family event. Knowing that my attendance at the family event would be an absolute requirement I resigned myself to missing the football match.

A couple of weeks later it was announced that the game at Chester was going to be televised and the game was being moved to the previous Thursday to accommodate the television company. What a result – even before we play. I get to see the game and be a good boy and attend the family event.

Keep going guys – just occasionally you win one!

All I have to do now is get Geraldine to understand that I still need to go and watch a match that is going to be shown on telly.

STROLLERS' GROUP

From: Patricia Percival, Strollers' Group co-ordinator

OCTOBER WALK AROUND DOLMELYNLLYN ESTATE

The early morning mist cleared to give a very pleasant day for our October Stroll in the grounds of Dolmelynlyn Hall. The starting point for the walk was the car park alongside the river on the edge of the Coed y Brenin Forest on the outskirts of Ganllwyd. From here our party of eleven strollers and three dogs set off under the blue skies.

From the car park we crossed the river bridge and turned left along a footpath which brought us to the main road across from the entrance gate to the Dolmelynlyn Estate.



A short distance up the estate road we turned right onto a footpath leading through fields, with some mud from the overnight rain, to the manmade lake. Here we had a break for our morning coffee while the dogs enjoyed playing in the water.



Continuing our walk we passed Dolmelynlyn Hall which is now used as a hotel and owned by the National Trust, stopping to view a stone said to have been taken from King Arthur's Grave. We then came to the most interesting 'Bee Wall', built in the second half of the nineteenth century and thought to be the largest example of its type in Britain.



The spectacular Dolmelynlyn waterfall then came into view looking its best after the recent rain. Here we spent some time taking photographs while getting wet from the spray. Crossing the wooden bridge brought us to the ancient lichen covered rock overlooking the waterfalls. The rock is inscribed in Latin with a line by the poet Thomas Gray. Alongside the stone is an English interpretation on a slate plaque.



The path down brought us past the black clad former church building into Ganllwyd Village, where we had lunch by the River Mawddach at the picnic tables provided. Refreshed after our lunch we crossed the river bridge and made our way back to our cars following the river along the forest road.

An enjoyable walk of 3.9 miles (from Vic's GPS) with many interesting features en route.

NOVEMBER WALK AT ABERDOVEY

For our November walk we welcomed three new members to our group making a total of eleven strollers for our Aberdovey stroll, plus Patch, Peter's dog, who is also now a regular member of the group.



We started our day on the early 8-50am train from Barmouth to Aberdovey. From the railway station we set off under the rail tunnel and onto the beach heading for the wooden jetty. Here we all went down the steps to see the recently installed Tidal Bell which rings at high tide.



Carrying on along the front we passed the Harbour Master's office and fishermen repairing their lobster pots.

We had planned to call at The Dovey Inn for lunch, but as we passed we noticed that they did not open on Tuesdays. Fortunately as we were looking for alternatives, a lady came out of the Britannia Inn and kindly offered to take our orders for lunch so

that it could be prepared for our return.



Our next stop was the most interesting Literary Institute Reading Room, which was the old Bath House dating back to 1882, with many photographs showing the history of the area together with a spectacular view across the estuary to Borth and Ynyslas.



Continuing along the front we passed the mussel-cleaning bath once used to wash the mussels caught locally, after filling at high tide. Just before the railway bridge we took a path to the right past a line of pretty cottages and gardens. This led us onto the rocky coastal path to 'Picnic Island' with lovely estuary views. At the end of the path, known as 'Picnic Island', we went down onto the beach where we had our coffee break. We then retraced our steps towards the town, some of us taking a detour up the steps alongside Penhelig Arms Hotel, leading to a footpath above the main road before dropping down into town by the Britannia Inn.



As promised, our lunches were already prepared for us on our arrival. Due to the prompt service at the Britannia Inn, this gave us time for some of us to take an extra short walk up to the bandstand with lovely views overlooking the town and estuary. We then made our way back down in time to catch the return train.

DECEMBER WALK FROM PENSARN TO LLANBEDR

The Strollers group continues to grow. Although several of the regular Strollers were unable to join us for the December Walk, we welcomed several new members to make a total of fourteen for our walk from Pensarn to Llanbedr.



Most of us met on the train to Pensarn on a dry dull morning with others joining us at the station. We started the walk with half an hour's gradual uphill gradient on a narrow tarmac road, taking us up into the hills. From here we went across a rather muddy field to visit an ancient Burial Chamber, where we stopped for a drinks break.

Back on the road we followed a footpath with distant views of the coastline and Moelfre in the hazy mist.

From here a deviation to the planned route was suggested by one member, taking us past his home. We crossed a wooden bridge onto a very pleasant riverside and forest walk, returning to Llanbedr and through the village to The Victoria Inn where we had our lunch of soup and sandwiches. For convenience we then caught the bus back to Barmouth. Another pleasant Strollers Walk.

U3A WALKING GROUP

From: Norma Stockford

Ian arranged our November walk and it was a great day. After a cold start, the sun came out for a lovely 5 to 6 miles around Ynys. Ten members met at Talsarnau railway station (just down from the Ship Aground pub – so called, I have discovered, because it was once the house of a retired sailor – his 'ship aground'), and we set off over the railway crossing towards the marshland. We were soon rewarded with a view over the Dwyryd estuary to Ynys Giffan. The island is now uninhabited, but was home to the Roberts farming family for much of the 20th century and can still be accessed at low water by wading through the estuary.

The view across to Portmeirion was stunning in the winter sunshine.



We made our way to the old church, 'Llanfihangel-y-Traethau'. This translates as 'St Michael's on the Shores', because at the time it was founded, the church would have stood on a rocky islet, surrounded by marshes; and the

name of the village, Ynys, translates as Island. It was not until the late Middle Ages that the tide receded, leaving Ynys church well inland.

The church is said to date back to the 12th century and a pillar in the church yard bears the Latin inscription – translated as:



“Here is the grave of Wleder mother of Hoedliw who first built this church in the reign of King Owain Gwynedd.”

Owain reigned from 1137–1170 so the churchyard is ancient and of the common more or less

circular ‘Llan’ shape. The original meaning of *llan* in Welsh is ‘an enclosed piece of land’, but it later evolved to mean the parish surrounding a church. We were told that the large stones protruding over the top of the wall circling the church were put there to keep wolves at bay!! We didn’t see any so it must work!

The churchyard has the graves of many local seafaring men, and amongst the others of note is that of the fifth Baron Harlech of Glyn Cywarch who was Ambassador to the USA during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Lord Harlech died in motor accident on the way back to his Oswestry estate and his funeral at this church was attended by Senator Edward Kennedy and Jacqueline Onassis.

This was a gentle walk with beautiful views and good company in the winter sunshine.

U3A STUDY DAY

Porthmadog U3A will host the 2014 Study Day on 7th May. It will be held in the Galeri, Caernarfon and the theme will be ‘Myths and Legends’.

These are often very interesting and thought-provoking days, and spaces will be limited to 20 per U3A so please let Alan know if you would like to come along, we will be putting on a bus as usual.

MONTHLY GATHERINGS.

From: Evelyn Richardson

OCTOBER

We had an interesting and fact-filled presentation on genetics and the effects they have on the health of the individual.

The talk was well illustrated with a variety of slides showing how the different chromosomes are identified and arranged in sequence throughout the whole of the body. We touched on gene therapy and developments in the treating and prevention of different conditions which cause ill health. This was a challenging afternoon with an insight into this important and rapidly-developing area of medicine.

NOVEMBER

As the booked speaker was ill and couldn’t attend, we had an “*All Our Yesterdays*” session where we split into groups for discussion, then presented to the whole group aspects of our early childhood. It turned out to be a lively and informative afternoon with many excellent reminiscences of our childhoods and gave us an insight into the way things have changed in a relatively short time. I am hoping to collect these together and add to them over 2014 and, with a bit of time and application, write them up - ***Watch this space!***

DECEMBER

Christmas party time again and what a party! 48 of you attended and I think a good time was had by all. ***A HUGE THANKS*** to all who contributed in any way. Many worked hard to make it run smoothly. The spirit of co-operation is alive and well in Barmouth U3A which makes it such a joy to belong to. Long may it continue into 2014 and beyond. A happy, healthy and prosperous New Year to all our members.

BADMINTON GROUP

From: Wendy Bramley, Badminton Group co-ordinator

I wish to say thank you to all our Badminton Members who come along on a Friday and share in our sport. Sometimes we have nine, sometimes we have four, but we always manage to get plenty of exercise and have a laugh. Anyone wishing to give it a try would be made most welcome.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy and Healthy New Year 2014.

SINGING FOR FUN



From: Evelyn Richardson

In February the Singing for Fun group will enter its seventh year. In the beginning, I must confess, I didn't realise how long it would last, if at all. I had never run such a group and wasn't sure how to manage it, and I learnt by trial and error.

Initially, I tried to match the songs we sung with a specific season or festival, but soon found out that this imposed too much on me. It meant the singers and the pianist would have an almost entirely new set of songs each month.

So I slowly built up a repertoire of music we liked to sing, with maybe one or two new ones each month, and this seems to have worked well over the years. We now have a large and varied list of songs to choose from. There are favourites we like and know well, and some we try once but don't repeat, perhaps because they are too hard or not particularly interesting. Christmas is easy as there are many to choose from, Autumn has some lovely songs, and in Spring we find some to reflect this season and so on.

We have a core of 26 to 28 regular members, aged from the late 50s to early 90s which I think is probably unique. The fact that we are not a choir in the respect that we don't perform to others but are willing to go along and sing with other groups, if they so desire, makes us different. Quite a few of our singers also sing in some of the many excellent choirs in this area, where they are provided with more formal and challenging singing opportunities.

2014 will be a testing time for us as Martyn is building up his teaching in Cheltenham where he and his family now live. He has, since 2006, provided stalwart support to me and the singers and has helped in many ways to make the sessions fun. He has been willing to accompany us in a wide variety of songs and, if I might be so bold as to say, he has learned a lot from being with us. I have learned far more than I ever thought possible about music and singing and have gained in confidence as a result of my involvement with the group and made many new friends. One could say that is exactly what the U3A is about - learning, enjoying and socialising.

Here's to a Happy New Year for us all, and lots of singing in the meantime.

TABLE TENNIS

From: Geraldine Vincent

We are still enjoying our Friday lunchtime sessions and regularly have 12 players. To this end I am investigating the purchase of a third table, to be retained at the Leisure Centre for us, so that we can play singles, doubles and hopefully invite other groups to matches.

The year ended with our final session on 20th December and we all enjoyed various nibbles, sandwiches and cake. A generous member also supplied soft drinks which we drank from china cups... Oh the quality of our group!

New members are always welcome and everyone will help those unfamiliar with the rules. We also need good score keepers!! Few members seem able to keep the score..... is this a psychological ploy?

We start again on 10th January 2014.

PUZZLE CORNER

Answers on page 8

1. What happened in 2013 for the first time since 1415?
2. Chris Huhne, the former cabinet minister, was sentenced to eight months for perverting the course of justice. How long did he serve?
3. A triptych by Francis Bacon became the most expensive painting ever sold at auction. Whom did it depict?
4. Who wanted to be stranded on a desert island with Neil Diamond and Robbie Williams?
5. Sir Alex Ferguson stepped down as manager of Manchester United. What year did he take on the job?
6. Why were high-wire walkers hired at Heathrow?
7. Who was Jang Song-thaek?
8. Whose autobiography was called Camp David?
9. And whose was 'Long Walk to freedom'?
10. Among the more quotable elements of the Divorce of the Year was the revelation that Charles Saatchi kept a "huge wodge of cash" – where?

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GROUP CO-ORDINATOR

From: Geraldine Vincent

I have just begun to get to grips with this role and in the course of the next few months will roll out ideas for new groups. Suggestions are always welcome.

Existing groups – if there is anything I can do to help please contact me on 01341 247415 or email geraldine@t4alv.com

I have already started to investigate grants for sports equipment, health and safety reporting, possible other U3A groups visiting. I hope to make 2014 a full and rewarding year.

BOOK READING

From: Rachel Cleaver and Evelyn Richardson



Our October book was ‘Murielle’s Angels’ by Mary Howell. It proved quite difficult discussing a book written by a person we know well. One wonders if we would have found different meanings to the various situations in the book if the author had been unknown to us.

However, it brought forth a very lengthy and interesting discussion and we certainly shared the opinion that writing a full length novel is no easy task and commend Mary very highly for her ability and her tenacity in getting her book published. We were pleased that Kathleen, our newest member, had been able to obtain a copy so enabling her to take an active part. We suggest that any member who has not yet read the book should obtain a copy forthwith.

In November we read a book penned by a local man, Tommy Porter, who lives in Barmouth. Tommy's book recounts the life of a boy from a family of twelve children from a working class family in Liverpool just as the Second World War was breaking out. When Tommy was quite young his mother, then his father, died of consumption, a scourge in those days. Despite efforts to keep the family together, Tommy and his younger brother were separated from the family and sent to an orphanage, the baby of the family was put up for adoption. Although they were poor there had been a lot of love within the

family, something which was sadly lacking whilst the boys were in care.

They made several attempts to escape and return home, but the orphanage was to be their life until, at sixteen, Tommy was deemed old enough to fend for himself. Tommy's and Alec's efforts to escape brought them in conflict with their keepers and they were treated in ways which, by today's standards, would be considered cruel and excessive. The two children then had to find their own way from Orpington in Kent to Barmouth with nothing but a list of stations where they needed to change trains, and a ticket each. Children in those days were much more self-reliant than today and they found their way to a ‘distant country’ called Wales where their older brother and sister had settled and where Tommy has lived worked and married since then.

Tommy wrote the book at the request of his nephew who had it published. He and Alan Vincent had friends in common who arranged for Tommy to come and speak to the reading group after we had discussed his book. The book could do with a bit more editing but the story is a reminder of how things were 60-plus years ago. It was only in the 1950's and 60's that we began to understand the effect of separation on young children and its long term effect on their future development. I cringe when I recall how we treated children who were hospitalised when I was a student nurse. Fortunately, Tommy seems to have survived unscathed but many didn't. Tommy is hoping to write more of his memoirs focussing on his early life and work in Barmouth.

Our December book was ‘The Other Hand’ by Chris Cleave. The story revolved around a young illegal immigrant – little Bee – who fled from her country after witnessing the rape and murder of her sister.

The highly intelligent young girl taught herself to speak good English from newspapers and the media during her two years spent in the Detention Centre. However, inevitably, she made mistakes which had quite an impact on her chances of survival after being released. A sad, thought provoking book, which gave us plenty of scope for discussion.

No meeting in January, our book for February will be ‘The Star by the Sea’ by Joseph O’Connor.

DISCUSSION GROUP *From: Peter Leyden*

In September the discussion was *Free Schools - do they work?*

We decided that the jury is still out on this one, but the media in the last few months, has shown that there are major problems with their operation, and control is only through Whitehall.

Is Education a commodity? - It seems to be going that way in Britain and everything that happens in the USA comes to be used in schools here. One of the principles of the U3A is education for life not for the few who have the money. Testing seems to take up more time than giving children an education. Finland is given as an example of high international ratings by the UK government. Well it seems that they are against centralised, evaluation-driven targets and more to do with high-quality tuition and allowing children the space to find their passions. There is no homework and no standardised testing until well into teenage years. All children receive a report card at the end of each term, based on individualised grading by each teacher.

In October we discussed: *What is culture and do we need it?*

Well this is one for a philosophy group, but it was a good debate.

Culture, according to Trotsky, encompassed all facets of social life in historical development, from the processes of wealth to customs, morals, law, religion, literature, art, science and philosophy. The sub soil of culture was the economy. This is a topic that could be expanded in the future.

The November topic was *Should Prisoners have the vote?*

The consensus was yes but only for those who have short sentences. Last was, *Do Prisons work?* Well one needs to know why we are locking more people up in the United Kingdom than anywhere else in Europe. Michael O'Brien's book *Prisons Exposed* gives a good insight into the system, as he spent nine years in prison for a crime he did not commit.



BRIDGE

From Christina Cook

If there are any U3A members who play, or have played, Bridge and would like to join our group on a Wednesday evening at the Parlwr Bach from 6 to 9pm, please come along. It is a friendly group of all levels and you would be most welcome . We play Rubber Bridge and occasionally Chicago. Everybody plays, you don't need a partner. Look forward to seeing you....

PUZZLE CORNER answers

1. The pope resigned
2. 62 days
3. Lucian Freud
4. Ed Milliband
5. 1986
6. To change the light bulbs! *Yes really!*
7. Uncle purged from North Korean leadership by Kim Jong-un
8. David Walliams
9. Nelson Mandela.
10. In a "zippy freezer bag above the fridge"

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The spring newsletter will be published for April. Please let me have your contributions by 15th March.