



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE



PRIFYSGOL Y TRYDYDD OED

# Barmouth U3A Newsletter Winter 2016

Welcome to the winter issue of our newsletter

Given the title I guess the subject of my piece should be about the weather. I'm sure every one of you has a "weather" story to tell so I thought I would give you mine.

A lot of you know that I have followed Chester FC all my life (first game 14/04/61 – Friendly against Third Lanark – my Dad told me we were going to watch an International Match!).

Well on 12th December we (unusually Geraldine had decided to come along as well) set off for a game at Telford – it was raining – passed the Cross Foxes and headed up towards the top of Dinas – the amount of water coming down the road was epic – every few yards waterfalls were coming off the fields onto the road – in the end I turned round at the car park on the top and returned home.

In part this was because of the water and what it would be like later that afternoon when returning, but also because Geraldine was "having kittens" in the passenger seat. Anyway we got home, and I think that the road was actually closed later, but the point of the story is that it was the first time in more than 50 years that I had given up whilst heading for a game – a momentous event!

Coincidentally, our neighbour Margaret, loaned me a copy of the Cambrian News dated January 15th 1982. It had been stored in a drawer by her husband John (who sadly passed away in October) and had only just come to light and is full of another epic weather event in this area. Blizzards, resulting in enormous drifts of snow all along the coast. So for those of us who were not here then, and maybe as a reminder for those who lived through it, I have reproduced a couple of pieces on the back page. The newspaper also reported that people had to spend a night in the Wayside as the roads were blocked.

*Alan Vincent*

## Film Group

Comedy was the order of the day for November and December with the brilliant "Airplane" watched in November followed by both Laurel and Hardy and the Marx Brothers for a Xmas time double bill.



A total change in mood saw us watching "To Kill A Mockingbird" at our January session whilst in February we will present our first western with the showing of "High Noon". Now I mentioned it will you keep humming the tune??

# Book Group



## **November: Go Set a Watchman – Harper Lee.**

Although published in 2015 there is something of a mystery about when this book actually was written. Harper Lee's first and Pulitzer Prize winning novel 'To Kill a Mocking Bird' was published in 1960 sold tens of millions of copies and was made into a film starring Gregory Peck. It is one of the enduring books of the sixties. Thus when a second book is published 55 years later, the interest was intense; Why had it taken so long? Is it in fact the first draft of her original 1960 book? There seemed to be 'something odd' about it.

Go Set a Watchman's setting is the same as Lee's first book – a small town in Alabama in America's Deep South. In Mockingbird the period is the late 30's when segregation and racial prejudice is ingrained but the young heroine, 8 year old Jean Louise (Scout) is brought up by her widower father Atticus not to judge just because they are different. She and her brother and friends have childhood scrapes and adventures overseen by the black housekeeper, Calpurnia; Atticus' defence of a black man accused of rape demonstrated his supposed tolerance and integrity and Scout loves him for it. 'Watchman' has moved forward to the mid 50's and Jean Louise is on a rare trip home from New York where she works. The story moves between life in fifties Maycomb and flashbacks of her childhood experiences but this is 16 years on and now there is a growing awareness of the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) and Black Youth is more aspirational.

To us in the 21st century, post Martin Luther King and The Civil Rights movement, the language and opinions in Watchman are unacceptable and shocking, and the adult Jean Louise, hearing her sacred father voicing such words and sentiments is a body blow – she is physically sick. She can't wait to return to a more tolerant New York but after a rather wordy and worthy political discussion with Atticus they reach a sort of rapprochement. Living in different times it was a difficult book for us to read and those who had read the prequel felt they only had half the story. Readers scored it between 2 and 8 out of 10, but like it or no 'Go Set a Watchman' gave rise to lively discussion.

## **December: Readers choices**

Sue had been very seasonal in her choice - David Baldacci's 'Christmas Train', in which a journalist travels from Washington to the West Coast of America in the company of various interesting, mystifying and controversial passengers. Sound familiar? Orient Express perhaps?

In fact one of the passengers is a film producer and the author has incorporated several homages to well-known films. There are avalanches, marauding cobras, love triangles and Tarot Readers – The Ffestiniog Railway this is not. Sue enjoyed the story and it is described as 'Heart-warming'. What more could we want for Christmas?

Evelyn chose a Mary Wesley novel, The Camomile Lawn (1983) made into a TV series in 1992 with Paul Eddington, Felicity Kendal, Jennifer Ehle and various other well-known actors.

It is set in 1939 in a Cornish coastal property where cousins Oliver, Calypso, Polly and Walter are visiting their Aunt and Uncle and young cousin Sophie. Also involved in the story are a Jewish refugee couple whose son is in a concentration camp. Oliver had recently returned from the Spanish Civil War depressed and disenchanted but his strong feelings for Calypso are still intact. All the young people are involved in

the coming war on some level and they release their feelings of stress in various ways – drinking, unpleasantness to others and promiscuous sex. There is a particularly nasty episode involving a local coastguard exposing himself on the cliff top.

50 years later the family is reunited for a funeral when the young attractive characters that were, have now been afflicted by mental and physical changes.

Mary Wesley was in her 70's when she wrote this novel and her life experiences enabled her to write convincingly about Sophie, the 10 year old child and also the emotions of Calypso and Polly because she had worked in London at the War Office and lived for the moment.

Evelyn thought the book had some very good points to make and found it – 'Charming and Easy to Read'. The Camomile Lawn stretches down to the cliffs from the house and it is along this clifftop that the family do their 'Terror Run' at full moon, an annual ritual challenge.

**Sylvia's choice 'The House under the Water' by Frances Brett Young (Published 1932) was inspired by the 50th anniversary celebrations of the flooding of Tryweryn, now Llyn Celyn. It provides water for Liverpool and involved the compulsory displacement of villagers from their homes and farms, a terrible experience which caused heartache and resentment.**

The novel contains a fictionalised account of similar circumstances with the building of the dams in the Elan valley at the turn of the 20th century. We follow the fortunes of the Tregaron family living on a large upland estate in an isolated part of Mid Wales and it is the compulsory purchase of their farm, together with several others in the valley, by North Bromwich (Birmingham) Corporation which provides a different insight to the flooding of an area.

Rather than concentrating on the human misery, a section of the book describes the coming of the men and machines, the railway and the rubber-neckers; dynamited hillside and devastation of the fauna and flora. As the dams hold back the rivers and streams – lairs, holes and burrows are inundated, fox cubs drown in their earths, bloated animal carcasses bob against the dam wall, spiders climb watery walls in its roofless cottages and submerged fruit trees shed blossom in the gloomy depths. The author's observation of the effect on the environment conveys the sadness of such flooding very well.

Betty produced a slim, but perfectly formed 1919 volume with lovely marbled covers and those old pages one had to cut open at the edges in order to read them (Why was that?). It is 'The Young Visitors (sic) by Daisy Ashford and remarkably the author was just 9 years old but wrote an adult story of Royalty, unrequited love, and marriage.

Chatto and Windus published it as they found it, warts and all, with all the delicious spelling errors – 'aristocracy'; 'viacle'; 'bisness'; 'presumshious' – don't you just love them? The famous author J M Barrie did: in his preface he imagines the young Daisy, 'her tongue firmly clenched between her teeth in deep concentration; It is a lovely, funny book and has one of those arresting and memorable openings to compare with: 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times', or, 'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again'.

Daisy begins her novel:-

'Mr Salteeena was an elderly man of 42 and fond of asking people to stay with him, he had quite a young girl staying with him, 17.'

('nuff sed!.....)

*Sylvia Hayworth*

*A review of the January book is on page 11*



# New Zealand Blog

I have been here just a month now and getting used to the good weather and light evenings. A visit to the Antarctic centre and a blast of wind chill helped remind me of the weather I left behind in December.

Christchurch is a city in recovery practically being rebuilt following the earth quake in 2011. There are cranes and diggers everywhere but still there are many areas still devastated and many cleared areas awaiting redevelopment.

What one can't miss though is the liveliness and can do attitude of the inhabitants, it happened but now let's get on with our lives. The city is full of tourists from all over the world, I am lucky to have family and friends to show me round.

However I am quite confident finding my own way about, helped to some degree by good bus services, the trains are for mainly tourist excursions which are brilliant if somewhat scary, I did the trans Alpine one earlier this week which took us through mountains and over rather insubstantial looking viaducts ! All good fun.

Time is whizzing by as it always does when on holiday only another four weeks to go then a long tedious journey back to the U.K. Cheers for now.

*Evelyn Richardson*

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## Monthly Meetings

### November

At the monthly meeting in November we travelled along The River Rhine courtesy of Alan Vincent.

He told us that a few years ago he had come across a journal written by his father after a visit to Germany in 1937. His father had travelled from Birmingham with his cousin and eight other Venture Scouts to London, Dover and Ostende eventually arriving in Cologne.

There they explored the city and enjoyed the German cuisine (many of the entries in the journal focussed on food) before they continued their journey along the Rhine.

In the journal his father not only describes the numerous castles, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century buildings, vineyards, people they met, food they enjoyed and spectacular sights surrounding this magnificent region but also illustrates it with photographs of the group and the places they visited.

In 2011 and 2014, Alan and Geraldine decided to retrace his father's journey and they cruised along the Rhine visiting the same places as his father all those years ago. Alan's sister accompanied them on one of their journeys and there is a photograph of them both standing in exactly the same spot as their father in 1937.

Alan's talk was beautifully illustrated with photographs taken by him and he also told us about the history and geography of the land through which they travelled.

It was a very emotional journey for Alan and his sister and one that we thank Alan for sharing with us.

### December

The meeting in December was the Christmas party. Members arrived to a festively decorated room, Christmas carols playing in the background and the delicious smell of soup bubbling in the kitchen.

A glass of wine or beverage of choice was offered, and then the soup and rolls were served followed by mince pies and coffee. After the food and drink, the games began.

Bronwen had kindly produced a picture quiz that was not as easy as it seemed at first glance, caused much discussion and was greatly enjoyed. This was followed by a game where as many items as possible from a given list had to be found. It caused quite a lot of hilarity particularly when ladies wishing to borrow his tie chased Alan

around the room.

The Christmas trivia quiz was next and the winning team was presented with a box of chocolates.

Alan's compilation of films was the highlight of the afternoon; it was hugely enjoyed by all present. A very good ending to a very enjoyable afternoon.

Thank you to everyone who worked so hard in the preparation of the party and helped to make the afternoon run so smoothly. But most of all thank you to everyone who came along.

## January

'The Art of Massage' was the subject for the monthly meeting in January and the guest speaker was Sandra Padbury.

Sandra began by telling us a little about her history; how she has been gifted with the art of massage, teaching in Steiner Schools, working in organic gardening and the distribution of organic food and how she follows a very healthy organic lifestyle.

The meeting then became a demonstration as she asked for a volunteer and Sue duly obliged. We all watched as Sandra gave Sue an Indian Head massage followed by a body massage, which Sue really enjoyed. Then followed John who stripped off his top to the delight of the audience and whilst massaging him Sandra answered questions. During the meeting most people present had a massage and went home feeling very relaxed.

It was a very enjoyable afternoon with many members arranging for Sandra to visit them at home.

*Jacqui Puddle*

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## Discussion Group



We are getting a better attendance at the meeting but still have had no ladies at all for the past months. Please come along Ladies— we do not want to be called the 'old gits club'.

### October: What is History?

Why does history not tell the real truths of the events that have occurred in the past?

This was a lively debate as it was agreed that history can be explained not just by the oral or written. From Cave painting of thousands of years back from Australia to Europe, to the finding of lost civilisations over the past 150 years or so.

Also a lot of nation states have invented their past, some like the state of Israel and what is left of Russia.

### November: Medical Science, Benefits and Drawbacks.

The use of science and improvements in the physical and mental wellbeing has come a long way in the last hundred years. But a lot of these improvements have come about by better housing, safe water and also better food.

The 1970'S saw the take-off of data collection and development of new drugs, which made some Pharma companies very rich but have left millions on medication they do not really need such as drugs for anxiety or mild depression. They even prescribe drugs for people that get angry in the USA; it is classified as a mental disorder.

### December: How Important is Space Exploration?

Well the consensus was it is but it not that important looking at the state of the world. Has it come up with anything really to the benefit of humanity? The costs may be cheaper now but until the world population have a basic standard of living that allows them to enjoy a decent and good life, space can wait a bit longer.

*Pete Leyden*

# Strollers Group

## November: Pont Brewit

Since Trish was unable to lead the November Strollers Walk, Eric and Louise kindly stepped in to lead the Walk from Llandecwyn, over the new Pont Brewit Bridge and around the Cooks Nature Reserve.

Unfortunately the damp misty start to the day appeared to put off our usual group of Strollers and only three turned up for the walk. However the walk still went ahead in the reverse direction to that originally planned with a look around the remaining sheds, the Pendulum Shed in particular, from the days of the munitions workings. Although the early rain kept off, the weather remained misty and views were limited and no photographs were taken on this walk.

The day finished with a visit to the Cafe on the Cooks site.

We will have to ask Eric and Louise to repeat this interesting walk, when the weather conditions are more favourable, for those who missed it this time.

## December: Pwllheli

For the December Strollers walk, after starting the day with a train ride from Barmouth, we combined a walk through the nature reserve and along the beach at Pwllheli with lunch at Wetherspoons.

On arrival at Pwllheli the rain started and it was decided to call in Wetherspoons for a coffee to allow time for it to stop. The rain turned to a light drizzle so we set off heading for the Nature Reserve, passing the dykes and stopping to watch the ducks.

Unfortunately the heavy rain then decided to return and we all ended up absolutely soaked. Being a hardy lot we carried on with the walk with the



slight variation of walking through the housing estate rather than along the now muddy paths, which had been originally planned.

On reaching the beach the rain had stopped and with the brisk wind behind us we soon dried out. With now blue skies above we walked the full length of the beach to a rocky area where we discovered large shells in the rock pools.

After a short rest we headed back to Wetherspoons, arriving just as the

next heavy shower started again. With the option of steak or Christmas dinner we all had an enjoyable lunch. We then had time for a quick look around the Pwllheli shops before catching the train back home.

## January: Llanbedr

Despite a dull damp morning our January Strollers Walk at Llanbedr, led by Kevin Hall, was well supported with four members meeting on the 10-00pm train from Barmouth and a further eight joining us outside the Victoria Hotel in the village. As we walked up from the station we saw workmen and machinery beside the road. It was pointed out that this was the proposed route of the new Llanbedr bypass.

From the Victoria Hotel we followed the fast flowing River Arthro to the right, passing the school to our left. We stopped a while to watch a large pig happily munching a patch of brambles. It completely ignored us.

Taking a right turn where the two rivers meet, we crossed the bridge and headed uphill through a wooded area. Coming out of the woods we had a view of the sea and mountains with a few houses dotted around. Heading down the lane we passed a field with a couple of bulls (decided not to cross that field) followed by a field with unusual black sheep having a white cross on their face.

Now back into the village where we all enjoyed our lunch at the Victoria Hotel. Another enjoyable walk despite the damp conditions and light showers of rain.



## Lunch Group

The Lunch Group enjoy Christmas Dinner at the Dolgellau College



## WALKING FOOTBALL

I mentioned in the last diary that there was some interest in the Walking Football.

Unfortunately we have not found 10 people.

BUT The Leisure Centre, Barmouth are trialling such an event.

It is from 1 to 2 pm on a Thursday. If interested please ring Craig on 01341 280111.

*Geraldine Vincent*

## Badminton and Short Net Tennis

May I wish all our members A Very Happy and Healthy New Year. We are still enjoying our Badminton and most weeks we have two courts running. We are a variable bunch but we all enjoy the playing and the exercise, long may we continue. Any new players always welcome.

Since the start up of Short Net Tennis we have grown in strength, we have just about mastered the scoring and the sponge balls and find it a fun game. Initially we could have done with some ball boys! But I do believe we don't seem to run quite as far after the balls nowadays! Again, new members welcomed.

I would just like to mention Pauline Homer, one of our most regular players, she had a nasty fall whilst walking her dog Jo Jo and has broken her arm. We wish her a good and speedy recovery. GET WELL SOON PAULINE.

We shall miss you and do hope your soon free from pain.

*Wendy Bramley*



# Walking Group

## October: Trawsfynydd

Eight hardy souls and two dogs met on the Trawsfynydd Visitor carpark (including two new lady walkers, Beryl and Dorothy). The weather was fine but a bit windy and we set off towards the power station along the lakeside path. From there we continued along the road to the dam and had a quick drinks stop before taking the path downhill at the end of the dam. Here it became boggy in places and we all learned how to walk on bog and water from there on.

The path followed the wall for a while, over a stone wall stile and down to a stream which we all managed to ford without wet feet. After crossing the stream we turned right through a gate and followed the track for quite a way, a stop for lunch and then climbing until we reached open farmland, and headed towards Llenyrch farm. We turned right before the farm, passing pylons, walking on boggy bits and reached a stile before entering woodland. Keeping on this path in to the woods, where we took a right hand downward path and this brought us out at Cae'n y Coed, then down the track to take a path on the right. There had been some spectacular views in this first part of the walk.

The path continued a downwards trend along the valley, through woodland and emerged at the A496 near Maentwrog Power station. We turned right, crossing the bridge and turned up the little road beyond the PowerStation. This was a steep slog up for one and a half miles with a few stops to admire the views. We were joined along here by another member of the group who had started the walk later and done it in reverse to join us. Eventually the road takes a sharp left and we continued down a path from the bend, keeping left as the path branched and then continuing straight on to come out alongside Trawsfynydd Power Station.

It was only a short walk then to the carpark and cafe where we all enjoyed a good cuppa.

*Carolyn Evans*

## November: Foel Senigl

This walk was the back of Harlech, a hill called Foel Senigl.

Nine of us and two dogs. This was a short walk of four miles about 1,000 feet up, Although I had been up before somehow we ended up going the reverse of the route but we all got to the top in the end.

The day was not all that good for views but we did get an outline of Snowdon 15 miles away.

Coming back down we went for a paned in the Harlech swimming pool cafe, which is run by the local community.

## December: Tal Y Waen

This walk saw a total of eighteen walkers and three dogs, Patch had a day off.

The walk was 4 mile hike to Tal Y Waen about a half mile from Dolgellau and was all on minor roads and was suitable for most walkers and even pushchairs.

There were some really good views of Cadair and the surrounding hills and the day was fine and dry.

We came across some metal structures just before Tal y Waen farm, it was thought by some it was to do with mining industry but Carolyn said it was Old War Department rifle range target holders. Read the walk guide and it was in small print upside down.

*Pete Leyden*

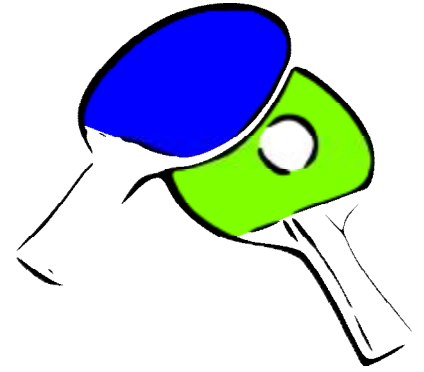
## Table Tennis

We have enjoyed our Friday lunchtimes at the Leisure Centre. We regularly have between 7 and 12 people attending. We have the availability of three tables so can hire according to numbers attending. At £1.50 per session, per person it is good fun. The main hall is now quite full on a Friday and at times we seem to be hitting the low net tennis ball or even worse a croquet ball.

Since the inception of this group, new members who had little or no skill are now becoming good players and those who were already star players are now champions. (No naming names!!).

Come and try we would welcome you.

*Geraldine Vincent*



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## Group Co-Ordinators Report

For a small U3A I think we provide a good cross section of activities.

Some branches have as many as 40 different groups, but because they are so big they also have to stage their monthly meetings into two separate days. I think we are about the right size.

All the groups we have are managing to maintain their costs and it is a pleasure to see them all thrive. The new Short Net Tennis has been a success. The Walking group is managing as many as 18 bodies plus dogs (Shall we do a leg count?)

To those who have groups in their own homes and to those who lead all the groups Thank You. As an aside the U3A Insurance does include all our venues.

Although unable to reach a playing number for the Walking Football I am still happy to try and get other things off the ground.

Coming soon: A year-long project being launched in March by Evelyn Richardson. More details below.

Enjoy all the groups.

*Geraldine Vincent*

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## Hometown Research Group

We are well into 2016 and I hope to have the first formal meeting of this group after the monthly meeting in March. If anyone who is wondering what on earth I am talking about then come along and I will explain all.

I would like to stress that the research can be in any form, formal or informal as long as it gives a valid picture of the place where you grew up or the most formative home town. I would like you bring your first efforts and musings so that we can share ideas about all aspects of the task.

I would like the results to be displayed next year as part of our celebration of the 10 years that Barmouth U3A has been in existence. We will meet monthly or thereabouts over the coming months to discuss and plan our efforts.

If anyone wants to ring me after I return with a bit of luck I will have a landline early March. Until then start thinking, researching and recording in any way your material. Looking forward to meeting you all . Happy New Year.

*Evelyn Richardson.*

## Book Club (2)

January: [The Road to Little Dribbling](#) by Bill Bryson

The book chosen to read for January's meeting was 'The Road to Little Dribbling' by Bill Bryson. Bill Bryson, is an author of humorous books on travel, as well as books on the English language and science. He was born in the American Mid-West, and is now living in the UK.

Firstly it must be mentioned that half our members were unable to be at the meeting due to illness or holidays. Of those present to discuss the book only two people had attempted to read it. It was agreed that it is not a book to be read from beginning to end, more a book to dip into.

This book is the sequel to *Notes from a Small Island*, published almost 20 years ago, and this time Bill Bryson decides to travel along 'the Bryson line' – from Bognor Regis in the South of England to Cape Wrath in the North with detours here and there – his idea of the longest straight line possible on the map of Britain.

It supposedly describes a journey from the south coast of England to the north coast of Scotland but the vast majority of it describes the southern quarter of England, one chapter mentions Wales, and finally Scotland is referred to in ten pages and most of those are on a train.

There is a mix of anecdotes, fascinating facts (which are occasionally a little adrift from reality) and shrewd observations but he does fabricate a little and he is very cynical.

There appears to be no theme or purpose to the trip and it seems to take place in pieces when he could spare the time. He pads out the book by mentioning his many visits to coffee bars, pubs and hotels for meals and refreshments and going to visit museums and attractions that are shut when he arrives.

Perhaps we missed the sentence describing what it was like when he arrived at Little Dribbling. Do we care?

*Jacqui Puddle*

## Singing For Fun

One of the aspects of running a group, especially one that is approaching its ninth year is getting the balance right between tradition and innovation.

Well for the next two months i.e. January and February, innovation will be in the ascendancy as the session will be organised by Sally and Jocelyn. I hope that the traditional good attendance will also be in evidence and the singing and laughter carry on as I lounge in the sun in New Zealand .

Well not exactly as I will be snugly asleep as the time difference is about 12 hours so I can't honestly say I will be thinking of you at the time.

Thanks to all the singers who led the singing at the Jazz just before Christmas, I had some good feedback and hope that you enjoyed singing and leading the large and lively audience in a variety of songs.

Able led as usual by Martyn I think we did well and the only regret is that we couldn't complete our full programme due to the late arrival of so many of the audience and time pressure.

Anyway it was a first for us and we have been asked to sing in May at the all Wales U3A Conference on the 4th May. We'll discuss the possibility of this in March. So a happy new year of singing to all to all both old and new members.

*Evelyn Richardson*

## The Cambrian News, Friday, January 15th 1982

...Dolgellau, Barmouth and Tywyn were cut off on Friday afternoon and it was not until Sunday afternoon that routes from Dolgellau to Trawsfynydd and Dolgellau to Bala were opened by the highway authorities to four-wheel drive vehicles. Tywyn was still cut off Monday afternoon. There were 4 foot drifts in the Tywyn main street and a bread lorry and food delivery lorries were trapped in the town over the weekend.

Seven passengers on the Cambrian Coast Railway had to spend the night in their train after it got stuck in a snow drift just north of Tonfanau...  
... "when it became evident that we were not going to be rescued I organised all the passengers and crew to get together in the one compartment near the front of the train. This was the warmest place on the train".....  
...their ordeal was over some 20 hours later at 10:30am on Saturday morning when the RAF Valley helicopter landed near the train and took them to Tywyn....

A train brought in from Machynlleth to try to assist the train stuck at Tonfanau went into difficulties itself when it got stuck in drifts. It was then decided to bring in a plough train from Shrewsbury but this was delayed at Glandyfi because of drifts and frozen points.

....a two-coach train was derailed just north of Barmouth at Sunnysands, Talybont, when it ploughed into a large drift. The front part of the train was embedded in the bank  
There was no one on this train apart from the driver and he managed to disconnect the second coach and make his way back to Porthmadog.



## Barmouth U3A, Officers 2015/16

**Chairman**  
Vacancy

**Vice Chairman**  
Alan Vincent: 01341 247415  
[vicechairman@barmouthu3a.org.uk](mailto:vicechairman@barmouthu3a.org.uk)

**Treasurer**  
Christina Cook: 01341 280374

**Secretary**  
Bronwen Dorling: 01341 250085  
[secretary@barmouthu3a.org.uk](mailto:secretary@barmouthu3a.org.uk)

**Newsletter Editor**  
*Alan Vincent, 18 Llwyn Ynn  
Talybont, Gwynedd, LL43 2AL  
01341 247415  
[alan@t4alv.com](mailto:alan@t4alv.com)*

The Spring newsletter will be published end of April.  
Please submit your contributions by **10th April**