

Chiltern District Welsh Society

Winter Newsletter 2020



Chairman's Report

I hope that you and your families are all keeping safe and well in these strange times.

Welcome to a very unusual edition of the newsletter after what has been a very unusual year, with many of our planned events having to be cancelled.

I am afraid that the 2021 programme is still uncertain until we can be surer of what can be safely undertaken, but we will keep all of our members up to date with events.

What we do have planned is a Virtual Christmas Drinks lunchtime gathering via Zoom. Gwyndaf has sent out an email with the details (Sunday 13th December at 5pm) and we hope to be able to see you then. I'm afraid that due to limitations of the technology you will each have to provide your own drinks and nibbles; however, Jonathan will conclude the evening with a small selection of carols and end with the National Anthem and we can all join in (with our microphones on mute).

We will hold our annual Quiz Evening on 22nd January. Again, this will be a virtual event, using Zoom. We will be split up into teams and be able to consult privately with other team members before giving the wrong answer.

As soon as we can be sure of restrictions, the committee will plan the rest of the year's events. We can hope for a socially distanced country walk, and more virtual meetings. The future of our other events, particularly St David's Day is still up in the air, but we will let you know of any changes as soon as they occur.

In the meantime, I would like to wish everyone a merry and safe Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year.

David Powell
Chairman

Treasurer

Peter and Pat Chapman have now moved to Wales (see their report below), and we now need a new Member of the Committee to take over as Treasurer.

The role does not call for a high level of financial acumen, merely being able to use a spreadsheet and bank electronically.

I know from past experience that asking for members to volunteer is difficult as our members tend to be shy retiring types. So, if you think you know of anyone else in the Society (who is not already on the committee) with some basic numerate skills please forward me their names in the strictest confidence – your anonymity will be assured.

AGM 22nd July 2020

This year we had a distinctly untypical AGM.

Held in the afternoon, in July, with no food, with very little time to chat, with no entertainment, with no wine, and without even leaving the house!

I am thankful that about 30 of us signed into our Zoom session and looked at the other members looking back at us.

David Powell opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and giving the sad news that Peter Day, Kay's husband, had died earlier in the week from an asbestos related disease. Peter has been a good friend to the Society, a regular attendee and an organizer of our trip to wetlands bird sanctuaries in his role as chairman of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and will be sorely missed.

David gave his Chairman's report, commenting that although we had had to cancel or postpone 3 events, over the past year we had been able to successfully hold over 10 events.

Membership has remained steady at 120, with new members replacing those who have left.

Peter Chapman gave his Treasurer's report from Brecon and said that the Society's finances are in good order.

It then came to the election of the officials. All members of the Committee agreed to stand again for the following year, with the proviso that Peter Chapman will need to relinquish his post as Treasurer within the next few months when he and Pat complete their move to Wales.

David thanked the committee for their time and effort in running the society and running its events. He also called for members to volunteer for Committee membership as without them, the Society cannot function.

This must have been the fastest AGM on record!

CDWS Golf Day 4th September 2020

It was so nice to be able to catch up with some old friends in a socially distanced way. It was the first occasion that the Chiltern District Welsh Society had been able to meet since our St David's Day Dinner back in March at the start of the lock-down.

We arrived at Oakland Park Golf Club at



about 9am to be greeted with bacon butties to prepare the competitors for the morning's exercise.

Unfortunately, some of the participants had to call off due to injury and Gwyndaf John did

some hasty rearrangement of the teams.

David Powell and Colin Picton formed the supporters' group to wave off and welcome back the golfers.



Due to Covid restrictions rules were changed to allow for

social distancing. Conditions were good, with sunshine and a slight wind.

The competitors formed themselves into 4 groups – three 3 balls and one 4 ball set off about 10 minutes apart.

The supporters returned to the course at 12:30 to find the first group at the eighteenth hole and accompanied them for refreshments at the 19th hole.

Soon after, the 2nd and 3rd groups returned and we compared scores, with Kate Picton quietly confident of the result. We waited for the fourth group to arrive...

Some 30 minutes later the last group arrived – and when their scores were compared – proved to be the winners! Gwyndaf looked quite pleased.



David Powell presented the prizes to the winning team.

As the restaurant was closed there was no chance for a meal, so after congratulating the winners, we said our farewells and returned home.

Our thanks to Rob Britton and Gwyndaf John for arranging the day.

Lockdown Stories: Peter Chapman

Moving House during Lockdown

In January 2020 we decided to move to Wales, agreed to buy a house in Brecon and the process started. At that time there were the first news stories of a virus taking hold in China. In February we travelled to northern Italy, just as a rapid increase in cases caused lockdowns in a dozen towns in Lombardy. By the time we left on February 24, the Venice Carnival, a huge tourist attraction in which thousands of visitors pack the city, had been abandoned. We left by train to travel over the Brenner, through Austria and on to Munich for our flight home. That morning BBC news reported that on the previous day, Austrian police had removed two passengers from the train because they were coughing. We had an uneventful journey home.

Our purchase was completed on March 18 and we travelled to Brecon with a table, two chairs and some other basics to take

possession. We had a radio, but no wifi, so we weren't following the news regularly. We listened to the BBC 10 o'clock news on March 23 and heard with surprise Boris Johnson's announcement from a couple of hours earlier, telling us to go home. We got up at 6 the next morning, went about making the house secure for a lengthy absence and departed.

We had a house in Wales which we couldn't move into. We had a house in Gerrards Cross which we couldn't sell because estate agency activity was suspended.

It was the middle of May before anything changed. Estate agents reopened in England but the restrictions continued in Wales with a travel limit of 5 miles from home. However, a close reading of the regulations appeared to permit travel in connection with a house move so we set off for Brecon with some trepidation, after reading that Dyfed-Powys Police were issuing more fixed penalty notices than any other constabulary, attempting to discourage visitors to the Brecon Beacons in the beautiful early summer weather we were enjoying.

The summer progressed with us spending more than half our time in Brecon. The sale of the house in Gerrards Cross was not complete but we decided to make October 23 the date for changing our address because BT came to install a landline in Brecon and disconnect Gerrards Cross. The Welsh government's "firebreak" lockdown for 16 days started a couple of hours after the BT people had left.

Fortunately, builders' merchants stayed open during the firebreak, so work we are having done on the house could continue.

Finally, on December 1 we exchanged contracts to sell the Gerrards Cross house and our move will be complete on December 23. Our story for 2020 is that we agreed to buy a house 8 days after the start of the year and it will be our sole residence 8 days before the end of the year.



Brecon's 12th c. Norman castle above the River Honddu

Gwyndaf John

Every cloud has a silver lining.

2020 started so brightly for Janet. A birthday celebration with family in January and a busy year ahead to look forward to.

As the Meetings Secretary of the Wild Flower Society she had planned her third annual programme, and it promised to be the best yet. From spring to early autumn this national society for amateur botanists and wild flower enthusiasts holds field meetings all over the British Isles. The highlights are trips, led by experts, to special places in order to find examples of distinctive and rare flowers.

We had booked and were eagerly anticipating visits to, amongst others, the Isles of Scilly; the Grampians in the Scottish Highlands; the Derbyshire Dales; and to North Wales. I can be helpful for Janet sometimes as the latter trip had been arranged through bilingual emails with its leader Delyth Williams, a well-known botanist and former Secretary of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.

But then came Covid. A big black cloud over the carefully arranged plans. The lockdown towards the end of March led to the immediate cancellation of the entire programme. Our plans to stay in beautiful places and to visit friends and relatives en-route were ruined.

So, what to do instead? Friends and relatives had to make do with voice or video calls, and we started to explore more of our local public footpaths. Armed with an OS map we set out just a little further afield than the busy paths of our local common.

And what a treasure trove of wildlife we discovered. Who knew that emus and alpacas frequent the Chilterns? And as for flowers, what a hotspot we live in.



Coralroot Bittercress (*Cardamine bulbifera*) near Coleshill April 2020

Coralroot is found, with very rare exceptions, in the arc of land between Wycombe and Watford. As it only flowers for a couple of weeks we were lucky to come across stands of it near Seer

Green and then Coleshill. The picture taken in early April shows the flower with its distinctive purplish bulbils down the stem.

In early May we spotted a small patch of Early Purple Orchids in a wood at Hedgerley. We'd walked this path regularly for decades yet never realised they were there. The treats continued to show up on our walks, like the Goldilocks Buttercup with its strangely ragged flowers, and the very rare native tulip – it's small and yellow in colour by the way.

Because our plans to gallivant around the country had been thwarted, we were able instead to find special plants locally and learn much more about them – when they flower and the environments that they need in order to survive. The cloud over our lives did have a silver lining.



Goldilocks Buttercup near Little Missenden April 2020

Jonathan Pegler

Our Journeys through the Lockdowns

It is about 8.00pm on Monday, 23rd March and we've just had dinner in our flat in Porthcawl, where we're hoping to snatch four or five days. It's been a busy day: we left home just after noon; we've called in to see Hywel and Emma in Bath; we've done some shopping for our sister in law in Newton; we haven't had time to unpack the car. We watch Boris's broadcast: lockdown is announced. We empty the freezer and pack all the perishable food, tidy up, we're on the road before 9.30, and back home in Chalfont St Peter just after midnight.

Our daily exercise over the next eight months feels as though it's consisted of exploring every possible permutation of roads and paths covering the mile or so between home and Gerrards Cross: routes from the direct to the downright circuitous!

Spring Bank Holiday Monday is Jayne's birthday. On the Sunday, we drive down to Bath. We can't go into the house, but Hywel has cooked a barbecue, Alexandra Park is 5

minutes away and we enjoy a socially-distanced picnic. Police patrolling the park perimeter wave; we must be following the rules!

The Welsh rules are relaxed on 6th July, a lovely day, and we arrive in a busy Porthcawl at around midday. The Salt Lake car park is full. Who remembers the glory days of Miners' Fortnight in the 60s when it was packed with double-decker buses from the valleys? Social distancing discipline is not like in Buckinghamshire, though

We enjoy three more visits to Porthcawl over the summer. We manage a glorious day in bright sunshine with Jayne's cousin Richard at Glyndwr Vineyard in Llanblethian.

September 10th sees us driving up to London. Jayne has an appointment with an eye specialist. Back at home in the evening, I'm seeing flashes of light in my right eye; perhaps the wrong person saw the eye specialist. Visits to Wexham Park and the eye clinic in Windsor confirm it's not serious but I have to be careful for many weeks to come.

On Monday 14th September we're in Porthcawl; Mark Drakeford says lockdown in Bridgend County is from 18.00 Tuesday. Do we go to our friend in St Dogmaels tomorrow or go home? We do both: we haven't seen her for ages and her husband is away walking around Wales (he's got as far as Conwy) for charity. We get back to Porthcawl, pack up, and are on the M4 exactly as the lockdown starts.

Saturday, 22nd November sees me on the 07.05 to Marylebone, along with just 3 other people: a trip to the Western Eye Hospital in Marylebone - same problem, other eye.

Tomorrow, 1st December, I shall be in Porthcawl alone for a site visit; Jayne isn't covered by the work exemption. Happily, though, it looks as though the Christmas rules will allow us to squeeze in a couple of days there on 26th and 27th December.

Who said lockdown was boring?!