

Chiltern District Welsh Society

Winter Newsletter 2014



Chairman's Report

Well, we've had a very successful six months. We've welcomed yet more new members: we've held a diverse range of events, all of which have been well attended and enjoyed.



If that sounds familiar it is because:

- (1) the Society continues to thrive; and
- (2) it becomes difficult to find new words to describe a thriving Society!

A pleasant and informative walk around the South Bank; yet another enjoyable and sunny golf day; five days based in Swansea during which we saw barely a drop of rain (!); the wonderful sound of the massed choirs at the Albert Hall: and that was just in a few months!

I don't have the gift of words possessed by our most recent speaker, the poet Professor Tony Curtis, so I'm going to let the reports themselves do the talking.

We have a lot to look forward to, and I hope our 2015 events prove as successful and popular as those of 2014 – not forgetting that we have one of our favourite events of the year – the Christmas Drinks party - still to come!

Nadolig LLawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda
Jonathan Pegler

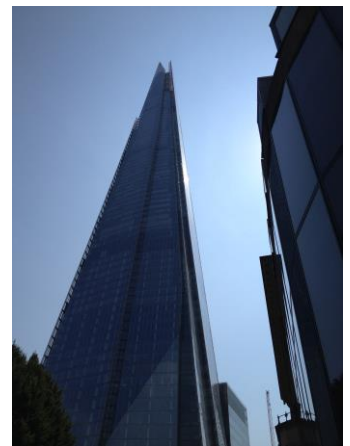
London Walk - 26th July 2014



A small group of members met our guide Caroline James, at the foot of The Shard on a sunny Saturday in June to explore sites around Southwark.

The area is at the southern end of London Bridge which in medieval times was closed at night.

Many inns were built there and thrived as staging posts for travellers. Theatres opened there as did hospitals for the poor, sick, incurables, and homeless. Bear baiting, prostitution, and similar activities which were illegal in the City flourished.



In a collonade of the adjacent Guy's Hospital a niche, from the old London Bridge, houses a statue of Keats.

Guy's was where Betsi Cadwaladr from Bala trained as a nurse. She too was a heroine of the Crimea with Florence Nightingale though their very different personalities clashed.

The 'garret' of the 17th century St Thomas' hospital houses its 19th century operating theatre, which is now a small museum open to the public.



Off a short stretch of Borough High Street are the 'Yards' of many ancient galleried inns. Only the splendid George Inn remains and it is often seen in historical films. Little Dorrit Park and Marshalsea Rd were reminders of Dickens stories set in this locality.



Nearby Redcross Gardens with its gabled cottages are a haven of serenity. They were founded by Octavia Hill who was one of the founders of the National Trust.

In Tabard Street the Cross Bones graveyard is an overgrown, unconsecrated plot where about 15,000 bodies of suicides, prostitutes, plague victims and other 'undesirables' are buried. We all felt sorrow just being there.



The Welsh Borough Chapel has just been renovated. One of its founders was known as 'Gin Shop Jones'. An old sign on its rear wall reads 'Commit No Nuisance'

From near the Globe theatre the dramatic view across the Thames included the recent 'Gherkin', 'Walkie Talkie', and 'Cheesegrater' buildings, all of which were outshone by glorious St Paul's.

Near the riverside Anchor pub was the site of the Anchor brewery which in the 18th century had the greatest output in the world. Hester Salisbury, the wife of its owner, Henry Thrale MP, was a socialite from a wealthy Caernarvonshire family.

Little remains of Winchester Palace from which the Bishop once issued permits for prostitution in the area!

We concluded our walk at Southwark cathedral and thanked Caroline for planning a walk with such a variety of places of interest to show us.

Ralph Broomby

Golf Day - 29 August 2014

What a fabulous summer and fortunately the weather on our golf day was once again kind to us.

We had 18 golfers sign up, so it worked perfectly without drafting in any of our stalwart extras. Mike Stythe was due to join us but sadly suffered some cracked ribs at the last minute and had to withdraw. We had an additional 6 members come for the lunch which was great. Our President was unfortunately called away to America and so was unable to join us.

Ann Lawrence, who was unable to play due to injury this year, kindly presented the prizes.

The results were as follows:

Winning team: Colin Thomas, Margaret Broomby, Marilyn Evans



Marilyn had a brilliant round, scoring top marks with 44 Stableford points. Jasper Garnham had the highest score for the men with 34. Colin and Pam Britton won nearest the pin and the longest drives were won by Margaret and Gwyn Owen.

Robert Britton addressed everyone, suggesting that maybe another year we should go to pastures new with fresh organisers and a new format. No-one volunteered to take over the helm, and the consensus seemed to be 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it!' So we have booked the same Friday next year at Oakland Park.

Colin gave a vote of thanks to Pam and Rob for organising the event.

Pam Britton

The Swansea Trip - September 2014

Another visit to "Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau"– this time to Abertawe. The Coach arrived on time at the picking-up points and then this joyous crowd of Welsh Supporters, seeking fun and knowledge, enjoyed a trip down the M4 in magnificent sunshine, over the Bridge, paid the entrance fee (no reduction for indigenous natives) and arrived at Porthcawl, much

tortured earlier in the year by gigantic waves breaking over the sea wall. There, close to the front, near Rest Bay for the agile, was Pegler Mansions! How envy poured out from everyone!!

Having received sufficient sustenance, the M4 was re-joined and shortly we arrived at the Premier Inn on the Water-front where we met our charismatic and vocally gifted Guide, Annie Haden, of anniefromwales.com, who introduced herself so well, that we were sure there might be an embarrassing family connection somewhere!!



After a good night's rest and hefty breakfast (for some), it was a walk along the river to view the Old Dock that



operated in the 18th Century, (that's 1700+!!) It now picturesquely shows its Norwegian



Church, an Ice House with its landmark of a Chimney and a rather splendid large Shed! As we cantered along the waterfront to the

National Waterfront Museum we passed the Dylan Thomas Museum - which was closed!!

Undaunted because we knew that Dylan appeared elsewhere on our programme, we lunched in the Waterfront Museum, enjoyed its very local exhibits of Welsh Life, and then off to the Guildhall to be greeted by The Right Worshipful Lord Mayor of Swansea, Alderman Ceirwen Thomas.

As she accompanied us around the building and its Brangwyn Hall she explained how in the extensive WW2 bombing of the City, Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to leave the Guildhall and its tall tower unscathed as he proposed to locate his Welsh head-quarters there! We wonder if Hitler took Welsh lessons in anticipation?

The Mayor showed enormous charisma and warmth towards us and we were treated to a sumptuous tea.



Close of day saw an exhilarating visit to Dylan's birth-place at 5 Cwmdonkin Place complete with writing desk. We savoured the place where he met up with his friends. Here he spent 23 years of his short life writing 2/3rds of his works: the house had been beautifully restored by volunteers that included Annie and her ex-husband.



An early rise with a glorious sun the next day saw us being bussed by driver Lyndon to Swansea railway station where the excellence of our Tour Organiser, Jonathan,

ensured that the train to Carmarthen arrived on time. Some people noticed the Customs' Booth at the station: clearly reserved for English Visitors!

The lovely views from the train as we journeyed along the Towy estuary in such beautiful weather were accompanied by Annie's witty remarks, her commentary and anecdotes.



At Carmarthen, some of our party left to tour the town and sample Dylan's tastes at the Boars' Head Hotel from

where he was thrown out on many occasions!



The rest went on to the National Botanic garden at Llanarthne to view the plants, an impressive Botanic Dome (largest single span glass Conservatory in the World!), the Tropical House, and a plethora of interesting Buildings (even a lovely "cwtch" for us to cuddle together!!).





Surmounting all was Middleton Hall with magnificent scenery and views of Paxton's Tower, a Folly dedicated to Lord Nelson which was built as a constant phallic insult to an annoying neighbour.



Next stop: Laugharne with Dylan's Boat House overlooking the estuary and a pair of welsh wool long-johns drying on a tree!!



There was the simple green garden "work" shed perched precipitously on the cliff edge where Dylan sat, coat on his chair, with his thoughts



of the World whilst watching the waves in the distance. For some of us, there was time for a drink sitting in Dylan's favourite window seat in Brown's Hotel, and a visit to the Castle.



We left the town in sun-shine and stopped to pay homage to Dylan at his (and Caitlin's) simple white crossed grave.



Next day saw us walking the Waterfront, fondly paying obeisance to Dylan's bronze life size statue, revisiting the Waterfront Museum to view such exhibits as a splendid exhibition of Swansea's involvement in WW2.



Then all aboard the SkyLark for a trip up the Tawe River to the Liberty Stadium accompanied by a knowledgeable local Guide who described

the significant remains of industrial sites preserved on the sides of the River,



previously scarred by unseemly deposits from copper smelting but now overgrown with beautiful greenery.

As we munched an excellent buffet on board the boat, it was intriguing to see in the middle of the river a cascade of bubbles coming, we were told, from long lost mermaids below us!

After returning to the Waterfront, we re-boarded the bus and were taken over picturesque moors and hills to Rhossili on the Gower: a bay ranked best in the UK, and in the top 10 in the World! My, what breathtaking views! Those who ventured as far as the Coast Guard Station overlooking Worms Head saw a Grand Piano being tuned in preparation for an open-air Concert!!!



Having savoured the splendid scenery, we sojourned to The King Arthur Hotel at Reynoldston where we ate with the evening sun pouring down outside: a fitting end to a magnificent day but not before Annie was thanked profusely for her excellent guiding, extensive local knowledge and banter, punctuated on occasions by a few “bloody boyos” and other Welsh unmentionables!



Next day, home! Calling at Neath Abbey and on to the magnificently restored Cistercian Abbey at Margam, surrounded by a Country



Park surmounted by the 19th century Margam Castle, whose spectacular Stone Staircases are reminiscent of Hogwarts. The Castle was built by the Talbot family using fortunes gained from steel production at Port Talbot. Gone were the skeletons of trees seen 40 years' ago (poisoned by acid rain) and in their place a magnificent forest of colour.



Our next stop was the Prince of Wales pub at Ton Kenfig near Porthcawl, a local for Jonathan!



Its Landlord, Gareth Mound, provided an enthusiastic talk on the area, an account of the devastation produced by a Welsh Tsunami, the discovery of a propeller from a long-ago stranded ship, the pub's local judicial history and sentencing of felons to be hung close by!!



Accompanied by a super buffet and engaging Welsh camaraderie, this was a more than fitting end to yet another fantastic trip.



Thanks to Jonathan for its organization and Lyndon for his safe driving!

And so to the next visit to our homeland for another satisfying feast of Welsh hiraeth!

John Edwards and Barrie Reece

London Welsh Festival of Male Choirs, Royal Albert Hall - 18th October 2014

25 members and friends were part of the audience to pack the Royal Albert Hall for the 24th Biennial concert of massed male voice choirs organised by the London Welsh Male Voice Choir. The group were picked up at Amersham, Gerrards Cross and Denham and transported to the venue by coach.

This year the committee decided, after advising the members early in the year, to only order sufficient tickets for those wishing to go, and to lay on the necessary coach. An early commitment was rewarded by a comfortable hassle free ride to and from London, and a very enjoyable concert.

One of the soloists was Rhiannon Llewellyn who entertained us so well at our Society's 2013 St Davids Day dinner. Well compered by Frank Lincoln, with three overseas choirs from South Africa, Sweden and Norway, the

two soloists, soprano Rhiannon Llewellyn and tenor Trystan Llyr Griffiths, Robert Nicholls on the organ and Annabel Thwaite on the piano, the concert flowed from beginning to end. It finished with the audience joining the choirs to sing Calon Lan, before the National Anthem. A fitting end to a varied programme that included recitations from Dylan Thomas by Trefor Ellis.

Maldwyn Pugh.

My Life with Dylan - 7th November

On the evening of 7th November at Coleshill Village Hall some 60 of members of the Society enjoyed a somewhat different event from our normal style.

The first noticeable difference was that the delicious light supper was provided not by outside caterers, but by a team of ladies from the Society - expertly marshalled by Jean Owen and Ann Lawrence.

Well fed, and having enjoyed an hour or so of lively conversation, we settled down to a most erudite and engaging talk from Professor Tony Curtis: "My Life with Dylan Thomas" based around his book of the same title that was recommended as a Summer read by The Observer.

Tony himself did not meet Dylan – but he had been taught at University by Vernon Watkins, Dylan's best friend, and has known many of the people (especially Welsh people) who encountered Dylan or were influenced by him. Tony is Wales's first professor of poetry and a fine poet in his own right, a past winner of the Western Mail's Dylan Thomas Prize as well as the Dylan Thomas Prize for Spoken Poetry. He is also an art connoisseur and avid collector. He was therefore uniquely qualified to talk to us about the Welsh poets he knew well (such as Vernon Watkins, Dannie Abse, and Glyn Jones) and Welsh artists (among them Augustus John, Ceri Richards, and Jonah Jones) whose lives were touched by Dylan Thomas. He interspersed his illustrated talk with poems, as well as presenting amusing anecdotes about Dylan's colourful life.

This was a comprehensive presentation and there was something in it for everyone and much for all to enjoy and appreciate – as evidenced by the lively and lengthy question and answer session, which Tony handled with panache.

I certainly learned a lot!

Jonathan Pegler

Future Events & 2015 Programme:

Make a note in your diaries for these events, This is the provisional programme - you can always see the latest updated programme at the Society's web-site:

<http://www.chilternwelsh.org/>

Xmas Drinks - 7th December 2014

The popular event is kindly hosted this year by Colin & Di Thomas at their home in Gerrards Cross,

Quiz Evening – Friday 23rd January

At Coleshill Village Hall

St David's Day Dinner - Friday 28th March

At Gerrards Cross Golf Club, with guest speaker David Jones, MP for Clwyd West and former Secretary of State for Wales

Theatre/Concert Evening – March date and details to be confirmed

Anglesey trip – 26-29th April

Self-drive visit to Anglesey with coastal walk. Tre-Ysgawen Hall near Llangefni has been provisionally booked.

The Society's AGM – Friday 8th May

At Coleshill Village Hall, followed by supper and entertainment.

Local Walk – June

Circular walk with pub lunch along Grand Union Canal at Marsworth, Herts

Summer Lunch – Sunday 19th July

venue tbc

Golf Day - Friday 28th August

The Society's annual trip to Oaklands Park, is for members and guests to enjoy a round of "social golf" followed by a sit-down lunch. This has always been a very successful golfing event – especially for the Broombys! As always, non-players are very welcome to join us for the lunch.

South East Wales trip – w/b 7th September

Coach trip to the Brecon/Hay on Wye/Abergavenny area with a single base for accommodation and varied excursions. Full details to be confirmed.

London tours - October

Proposed outing with tours of BBC Television Centre and also Fullers Brewery at Chiswick.

London Welsh Young Singer of the Year Competition – November

At the London Welsh Centre, Grays Inn Road, London. By coach to listen to the the final "sing-off".

Xmas Drinks - 13th December 2015

To be hosted by Jonathan & Jayne Pegler at their home in Chalfont Heights.

MEMBERSHIP

New members are always welcome.

Please contact our Membership
Secretary, Ann Lawrence on:

01494 727207 or

membership@chilternwelsh.com