

Chiltern District Welsh Society

Winter Newsletter 2016



Chairman's Report

Warmest greetings to you all at the end of another successful year for the Society. In 2016 we welcomed five new members, all events have been well attended and we have had record numbers at both the St David's Day Dinner and the A.G.M. Also, as always, maximum responses were received for the ever-popular Summer Lunch and Christmas Drinks. So, a reminder – places are only confirmed with payment. To avoid disappointment, please get those cheques to Graham promptly! Remember, next year Huw Edwards is the speaker at our St David's Day Dinner!

I hope you enjoy this Newsletter which captures the fun and friendly atmosphere at all our gatherings, magically always held in warm sunshine. Testament to the power of the Welsh?

We are sincerely grateful to both Bill and Dilys Dover for hosting the 2015 Christmas Drinks and to Ralph and Margaret Broomby for the Summer Lunch.

Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda

Kay Day

Cliveden House & Gardens Trip 19th May

Cliveden is conveniently local and was an excellent choice for a Society excursion on May 19th.



The grand house, standing high over the

Thames, is surrounded by gardens and extensive woodland. It is owned by the National Trust with the main part of the house leased to a luxury hotel group. An ideal place for our members to meet up and enjoy a convivial lunch, then take walks in the fresh air before returning for afternoon tea and a tour of the house.

Many members will have visited Cliveden before, but not so many will have enjoyed a guided tour of the house, led by a knowledgeable National Trust volunteer. Our party of twenty members discovered that there seemed to be two ways to become owners of such a magnificent residence. One was by family members consorting extremely closely with their King, whose favour resulted in titles and wealth. The other was for your family to develop housing in Manhattan and eventually become fabulously wealthy slum landlords. Even after the property passed to the National Trust its association with scandal continued as it featured in the "Profumo Affair" in the early Sixties.

We were impressed by the opulent interior of the property. The extremely ornate "French Dining Room" had been re-assembled after being transported from a French hunting lodge, and no expense had been spared on wood panelling, ceilings and pictures. As we wandered through the hotel and stood in the Great Hall we got a hint of the what it must be like to stay at this luxury hotel as a steady stream of staff passed by us on their service errands. On the banks of the river we saw their beautiful boats of wood and gleaming brass, ready to be hired for trips along the Thames.

For those who were members of the National Trust, all but three of our group, the event was completely free. Though the Trust café did very well out of us during the course of the day!

Gwynndaf John

Castles and Gardens, Mountains and Sea

Nineteen CDWS members assembled in Caernarfon on June 6 for the fourth expedition to Wales organised by Jonathan Pegler. We had warm, mostly sunny, weather and three full days of interesting activities which flowed on seamlessly from morning to evening, thanks to Jonathan's meticulous research and planning and to Dave, our coach driver, who whisked us conveniently between each one.



We saw four castles, including three of Edward I's "big four". We weren't close enough to Conwy. Caernarfon Castle itself was the highlight for me, because of its size, its completeness and the CADW guide who was a mediaeval history specialist and gave us instructive insights into what life in and outside the Castle would have been like in the 14th century.

We looked down from the towers of Harlech Castle at modern settlements built on what would have been the sea when the castle was reliant on ships for its provisions.

We also saw Beaumaris Castle, perfect in its symmetry and elegant design but incomplete, as we were told several times, because also in those times, governments ran out of money and could not afford big infrastructure projects.

Then there was Criccieth - a Welsh castle, not an English one, although Edward expanded it, and from where we could look across Tremadog Bay and just make out Harlech in the late afternoon misty sunshine.



For our gardens, we had Plas Newydd, given to the National Trust in 1976 by the 7th Marquis of Anglesey, although he continued to live there until his death in 2013, with its gardens sloping down to the Menai Strait. The first Marquis was one of Wellington's senior officers and he lost a leg to French shrapnel in the closing hours of the Battle of Waterloo.

Also on Anglesey was the hidden garden of Plas Cadnant, a gem of a small early nineteenth century garden brought back to all its former charm, tumbling down wooded slopes to a stream in a rocky ravine. When we visited Portmeirion, we enjoyed the eclectic mix of buildings and the gardens with picturesque views across Portmadog's estuary.

The tourist office calls our mountain the "Electric Mountain" and we didn't go up it but inside it to visit the Dinorwig pumped water storage power station. When the Dinorwig slate quarries closed in 1969, a project was conceived to use the site and the workforce to create a hydro-electric scheme in which water descending 500 metres through tunnels inside the mountain generates electricity during the hours of peak demand. The unique feature of Dinorwig is that all the equipment is capable of going into reverse and pumping the water back up again in the middle of the night using the surplus electricity of nuclear and coal fired power stations which have to run constantly 24 hours a day. Although it consumes four units of electricity for every three which it produces, it generates electricity when, for example, millions of people all switch on a kettle simultaneously at

the end of a TV programme. When in standby mode it can react in 12 seconds to produce the electrical output of three nuclear power stations and switch off again just as quickly. We had an excellent tour guide here who helped us understand its important role in aligning electrical supply to demand over the whole of the National Grid.



We enjoyed the beauty of the Menai Strait at sea level with a boat trip from Beaumaris Pier out to Puffin Island just off the eastern tip of Anglesey, where we saw plenty of cormorants and guillemots and a few puffins and seals. We came back to view the fine nineteenth century

iron work of Bangor Pier and looked up at Thomas Telford's beautiful 1826 suspension bridge which conveyed the A5 to Holyhead and cut several hours off the journey from London to Dublin as the traffic increased substantially after the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800.

We had already crossed and recrossed to Anglesey several times on the modern Britannia Bridge. Originally built by Robert Stephenson to take just the railway to Holyhead in 1850, its wrought iron box section was destroyed by a fire in 1970 which took hold of the tarred wood inside. It reopened after reconstruction as a road bridge on a deck above the railway lines.

However, on the last evening of our fascinating stay in North Wales, our wonderful coach driver Dave brought us back over the Thomas Telford 1826 bridge. We had time to get great views from above of the strong tide flowing out through the Menai Strait, because there was only 5 cms clearance between the wing mirrors of the coach and the stone arches over the road deck, so we went through rather slowly!

Peter Chapman

26th June Summer Lunch 2016

This year we returned to the Broomby's home in Chesham Bois.

Weren't we lucky with the weather? All week there had been downpours, but Saturday was better, then on Sunday, the



weather was bright and sunny.

Eight fine strapping chaps got to the Broomby's for 9:30 and proceeded to erect gazebos for the gathering. Although rather early for me on a Sunday, it is still one of my favourite pastimes, with lots of teamwork and camaraderie, as we tried to remember how everything fitted together.

My best quote from the morning (referring to how two poles fitted together) was - "No, it's not an A and an A1, it's an A1 and an A1".

Anyway, after about an hour of trying to get 9 guys to coordinate their efforts, the tents were up – not bad.

Margaret Broomby rewarded us with teas, coffees and biscuits, while we admired our handiwork and congratulated each other, feeling quite proud of ourselves, before going home to get washed and dressed up.

By 12:30 people started gathering at the Broomby's. There were plenty of parking places, with kind neighbours offering their drives for the afternoon, and people started talking about the weather, how good the trip to North Wales had been, and of course the football (Wales had just beaten Northern Ireland).

Kay Day welcomed everyone and Ralph Broomby entertained us all with a magic act involving a cooker which converted grapes into bottled wine.



Catering was provided by 'To Dine For' and everyone enjoyed the beef, salmon and salads, as well as the excellent chocolate roulade and berries.

Gwyndaf John had organised a quiz, to which the answer to most questions was 'Gareth Bale'.



Kay then thanked the organisers, the ladies who'd created some really pretty flower displays and of course Ralph and Margaret Broomby for kindly hosting the event for the third time.

Loads of people helped with putting things away, and do you know, it was well gone 4pm before we'd finished – where had the time gone?

David Powell

26th August Golf Day at Oakland Park

Once again we were blessed with lovely weather for the CDWS Annual Golf Day on Friday August 26th at Oakland Park.

Fourteen members competed for team and individual prizes and the honours went as follows:

Overall Team Winners : Marilyn Evans, Pam Britten & Peter Day

Best Individual Score Female : Jane Morris

Nearest the Pin : Ralph Broomby

Longest Drive Female : Jane Morris

Longest Drive Male : Brian Evans

The day concluded with a further fifteen members joining us for an excellent lunch at the golf club.

Everyone agreed that the day was a big success and looked forward to reconvening at Oakland Park next year.

Thanks were expressed to Pam Britton and Chris Thomas for organising a very enjoyable day.

Jane Morris

8th September Cambridge Colleges

The coach picked us up from Gerrards Cross and Amersham at 8:45 and 9am respectively (only a little bit late). Altogether we had a party of 28 in a large coach with plenty of room, and sitting up high we were able to see all the countryside over the hedges.

As soon as we were on our way, David Powell told us of a change of plan – Trinity had declared themselves closed for the day, right at the last moment, so we were going to St John's and Clare colleges instead.

The weather was fine and sunny, which was a great bonus. We arrived at Cambridge just before 11am, having made good time on the way and were met by our two guides Ann and Helen.

On Jesus Green, by the River Cam, we split into two parties for the tour, and walked along the river bank to Magdalene Bridge. This was our landmark as it was next to both St John's and the punts.



St John's College was founded by Lady Margaret Beaufort (mother of Henry VII) in 1511, and images of her can be seen in many places within the college grounds. One of the largest colleges in Cambridge, its entrance with the Great Gate is suitably impressive with a large statue of St John above the coat of arms of Lady Margaret. The curious animals depicted are yales, mythical animals with swivelling horns!



One of St John's claims to fame is that it was the college where, in 1588 William Morgan translated the Bible into Welsh (well before the English publication).

St John's has numerous courts, each built in a different century. We stopped for a group photograph in the first court dating from 1520.

Our guides took us through the various courts explaining their architecture and the source of their funds. We crossed the Cam to see the Bridge of Sighs, named after the original Venetian bridge. It leads to the Victorian Gothic New Court both of which were built in 1831.

From St John's we proceeded past the gates of Trinity and along to Clare College, the second oldest of the Cambridge colleges, founded in 1326. In fact, much of the college was rebuilt in the 17th century, to accommodate the newly built King's College Chapel, though work was paused during the civil war. We visited the chapel with its impressive altar piece by Cipriani and an unusual octagonal antechapel.



Nearby is a bust of Sir David Attenborough – with a shiny nose – it has become a new tradition for students to rub his nose for good luck!

Probably the highlight of the visit to Clare was the Fellow's Garden.

This was re-designed in 1947 by Professor Willmer, whose artist's eye added swathes of colour and carefully planned vistas to the two-acre site, all along the bank of the Cam. We were really lucky with the weather and the sunshine showed the gardens at their best.

We finished our visit back by King's College Chapel. The tour had overrun, but nobody minded. We were then free to do our own thing for the next couple of hours.

This showed the real variety of tastes within our Society. Some hurried off to see the display of illustrated manuscripts from all over the world on display at the Fitzwilliam museum, or managed to fit in a tour of King's Chapel.

Others spent the time wandering around the city, finding nice places to eat and admiring the rest of the college architecture.

While yet another group dashed off to visit one or more of the famous pubs!

Whatever the destination, there was still time to fit in a spot of punting – either with a guide or self-propelled.



By 4:30 people had meandered their way back to the footbridge over the Cam by Jesus Green, where our coach was waiting. David had to act as 'whipper in' to those who were enjoying a last-minute ice cream.

The coach left on time, with only a final traffic jam in Amersham making us late. Everyone agreed that it was a great day out, and only one of us fell in the Cam.

David Powell

13th October London Wetlands

Having followed the amazing directions provided by Peter, via Gwyndaf, a select party of eighteen souls duly arrived at the Wetland Centre in Barnes late morning on Thursday 13th October. We were met and greeted by the WWT Chairman himself, otherwise known to us all as Peter Day. Having downed a very welcome hot coffee, we then embarked on our tour, under the watchful guidance of Peter.



We were led through a series of avian habitats from around the world, which have been expertly created by the efforts of the Trust. It is astonishing what the workforce has achieved in less than twenty years by remodelling the redundant Barnes reservoirs and diligently planting an abundant amount of trees and shrubs.

Peter walked us round, demonstrating a very impressive grasp of the subjects and imparting his extensive knowledge. He managed to answer virtually all our questions, no matter how obscure or trivial they may have seemed.

We were blessed with a dry and mostly sunny day, if a little chilly. There was always plenty to see, with new surprises around every corner. Some of the birds there we would not have expected to see, like the Egyptian geese. However, as Peter pointed out, these had originally been imported from the Middle East by some unknown person and the young had escaped from their collection enabling them to fly to places like the Wetland Centre as and when they wished.



There is a constant threat from foxes and this has been largely controlled by surrounding the site with electric fences, extending up to three feet below ground, preventing burrowing.

Incredibly they do

not have a problem with squirrels or Canada Geese. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, originally set up at Slimbridge by Peter Scott in 1946, is doing very valuable work in the conservation of wetlands, their plants and waterfowl around the world. It is also providing an educational experience for many thousands of disadvantaged and other school children every year, some of whom we saw, and who appeared to be having a very good time.



peace and quiet.

After lunch, in the excellent café, a number of us enjoyed seeing the Asian otters being fed. Others enjoyed further strolls, taking in some of the hides where the wild birds can be observed in



Some of us were able to get this close to a wild sparrowhawk.

All in all the visit to the London

Wetland Centre proved to be both extremely enjoyable and rewarding, a visit we are likely to repeat in the future. We thank Peter Day very much for organising it and proving to be an excellent host.

Steve Adams

MEMBERSHIP

New members are always welcome.

Please contact our Membership Secretary,

Ann Lawrence on:

01494 727207 or

membership@chilternwelsh.com

Our Website has even more pictures and descriptions:

www.chilternwelsh.org

2017 Programme

20th January Quiz Night

This will be held at Coleshill Village Hall at 7 for 7:30 with Jonathan setting another of his tortuous quizzes and Ann Tennant providing the food. Bring your own bottles and glasses.

25th February St David's Day Dinner



At Harewood Downs Golf Club and we are lucky enough to have as our guest speaker Welsh journalist presenter and newsreader, Huw Edwards.

April/ May Spring Walk

Details to be confirmed.

5th May AGM

At Coleshill Village Hall with entertainment provided by magician Mike Smith.

19th June 5-day trip to Tenby

Jonathan Pegler is this year organising a coach trip to places of interest in South Wales based in and around Tenby – more details to follow.

2nd July Summer Lunch

This year the Summer Lunch will be kindly hosted by Ernest Morris in Amersham.

1st September Golf Day

Rob & Pam Britton and Chris Thomas will organise our Annual Golf Day at Harewood Downs. Non-players are very welcome to join for lunch.

September Coach Trip

Details to be confirmed

October/November

Welsh Tasting Evening

10th December Christmas Drinks

Di & Colin Thomas have kindly offered to host the 2017 event at their home in Gerrards Cross.

Committee Members

Occasionally we've been asked 'Who is responsible for this?'

Well, the names of the culprits are listed on the yearly programme, but here are some 'mug shots' of the committee members, so that you can identify them in future.



Graham Beavan is our Treasurer and looks after our finances.

Graham lives in Hyde Heath.



Jean Owen is our Minutes Secretary.

Jean is a founder member of the Society and lives in Gerrards Cross.



Ann Lawrence is our Membership Secretary.

Living in Coleshill, Ann also organises our meetings at the Coleshill Village Hall.



Anne Thomas has organised many of our popular trips such as those to Buckingham Palace and Highgrove, perhaps she has a royal connection?

Anne lives in Denham.



David Powell looks after the newsletter and web site.

David also lives in Gerrards Cross.



Ann Evans is the Life President of the Chiltern District Welsh Society, which she founded in 2000.

Ann lives in Chesham Bois.



Kay Day has been our Chairman since 2015, having previously been Society Secretary. Her job is to keep order amongst the other committee members – not an easy role!

Kay also lives in Chesham Bois.



Jonathan Pegler is Vice Chairman, having previously served as Chairman.

Jonathan has organised our very successful Welsh Trips over the past few years and sets the fiendish quizzes. Jonathan lives in Gerrards Cross.



Gwyndaf John is our General Secretary.

Another of our past Chairmen, Gwyndaf is responsible for all the communications with members. Gwyndaf lives in Gerrards Cross.