



South East Wales Unitarian News

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April 2014

FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 31 May – Copy deadline for the next issue of South East Wales Unitarian News.

Thursday 26 June – 2014 Annual lecture at Highland Place Aberdare at 7pm. Dr Martin Wright will speak on 'Wales and Socialism since the 1880s'. (See Aberdare news, below, for further details.)

Saturday 12 July – at Gellionnen Chapel (from 5pm) Mary Webb's *Precious Bane* performed by The Village Quire with reader Phil Smith. Admission £5. (See Gellionnen news, below, for further details.)

Leadership Workshop

The 'Spiritual Leadership and Developing a Congregational Future' Awayday originally planned for the end of March has been postponed until the autumn.

DEPARTMENT FOR UNITARIANS IN WALES

We congratulate Melda Grantham on her recent appointment as Secretary for Unitarians in Wales. She will work collaboratively with the General Assembly and the Unitarian Department for Wales to promote and encourage the development of the Unitarian Movement throughout Wales.

Melda was educated at Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron. She and her husband live in Capel Dewi, Llandysul.

Melda will take up her new post in mid April.

(See also 'From the District President' below.)



Photo: Courtesy of Keith Lewis-Jones

GA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE KEY MESSAGES 21/22 FEBRUARY 2014

1. Nightingale Centre

The Executive Committee was held at the Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow and was pleased to invite Marion Baker and Gwyneth Roper from the Centre's Management Committee to give a presentation on the many improvements over recent years. A display had also been prepared. The Centre was in a healthy financial position and the facilities had been upgraded with more to come. The focus on marketing to Unitarians and to others was producing positive results and many repeat bookings. The Executive Committee congratulated the Management Committee members and Centre Manager Stella Burney for their commitment and hard work.

2. Annual Meetings

The preparatory arrangements for the forthcoming Annual Meetings at Whittlebury Hall, Northampton were considered with an update report from the Chief Officer. These covered the overall schedule and evening events at the Meetings, the formal business sessions and the Executive Committee sponsored workshops. A mailing was planned for the end of February.

3. Stipend Review Committee Reports

Robert Ince, Acting GA Treasurer, outlined the reasons for two reports being presented to the Annual Meetings by the Stipend Review Committee which had met on 20 January 2014 at Cross Street Chapel. The first related to the usual stipend issues and recommends an increase in scales to move closer to the level of the Baptists, the lowest of other denominations. The second report gives the General Assembly an opportunity to remove the differential rate paid to Ministers and lay people when undertaking pulpit supply without affecting the other matters under discussion.

4. 2020 Congregational Development Programme Update

Applications for support are currently being considered with the 2020 Leadership Team to assess them against agreed criteria and make a decision on 20 March on which to recommend to the Executive Committee for funding. The Executive Committee agreed to meet prior to the Annual Meetings in order to make an announcement. A training event has been arranged for 12-16 May on congregational growth with Rev Dr Terasa Cooley, Programme and Strategy Officer for the Unitarian Universalist Association, who spoke at last year's Annual Meetings.

5. Upgrade to the General Assembly's IT infrastructure

The IT upgrade project is proceeding. IT facilities for staff at Essex Hall and working from home have been improved and all documents, shared drives, day to day office programmes and email are hosted by an external company, Workplace Live, on the Cloud with day to day support. Staff can as **easily** work from a location outside as in the office. The Contact Relationship Management system, which is replacing the current database, is now in use by staff with great potential to improve communication with the wider Unitarian movement. The new accounting system will go "live" after the Annual Meetings. Work on a new GA website, which we know is often the first place people find information on Unitarianism, is proceeding and it will seamlessly integrate with the other new systems. This is all a significant change led by Martin Sarbicki.

6. International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU)

The development of Unitarianism around the world was one piece of exciting news reported at the Council meeting of the ICUU held at Shelter Rock Unitarian-Universalist Church in New York. The work of the UU United Nations Office to promote human rights around the world in conjunction with faith and non-faith organisations was also highlighted, including a visit to the UN Building. The overall conference theme was "intercultural competency"; learning how we truly engage with people very different from ourselves. Eight people from Britain attended with 120 overall; the largest gathering ever of the ICUU. Rev David Gyero from the Hungarian Unitarian Church was elected President.

FROM THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT

As we emerge from our very wet and often wild winter it's very pleasing to see the sun shining and sky larks rising on Mynydd Gellionnen. I'm now looking forward to better days and to events which will bring us together as a Unitarian family.

On Sunday 6th July I hope as many of you as possible will be able to join us for the District Summer Rally. This is such a valuable opportunity to meet and enjoy something a little different together. Details will follow but we are exploring an idea to connect with the celebrations around the centenary of the birth of Dylan Thomas.

Dylan Marlais Thomas was born on 27 October 1914 in the family home – 5 Cwmdonkin Drive, Swansea. Behind the house ran an alley and across the road was Cwmdonkin Park. We are hoping to provide you with a programme of interest in Swansea. Marlais is the name of a stream near the birthplace of his great uncle, the Reverend William Thomas, whose bardic title was Gwilym Marles (Marlais). The Rev Thomas ministered to the Unitarian Chapel at Llwynrhydowen near Llandysul from 1860. On mentioning this idea to our friends in the South Wales District their enthusiasm was sparked so they hope to be able to join us. Going a step further they are now considering the idea of doing something along the Dylan theme in West Wales to which we would be invited. I think we will feel stronger by coming together and this will help boost morale in our small movement.

I am so pleased that we have made an appointment to the post of Secretary for Unitarians in Wales. Melda Grantham is a member and Chair at Llwynrhydowen Unitarian Chapel in Ceredigion. We should also be pleased that the interview panel, which included Keith Lewis-Jones as our District Representative, were faced with such a good field of candidates. Melda is currently the Superintendent Registrar at Ceredigion County Council. Despite the fact that she has not yet started her post Melda attended our Welsh Department meeting in March so she is clearly very keen! She intends to visit all our chapels very early in her tenure to meet as many members as possible. Melda starts her job later in April.

Julie Nedin

THOUGHT FOR NOW

(We are indebted to Anne Jones for bringing the following to our attention.)

Darkness cannot drive our darkness; only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1928 - 1968)

ABERDARE

Greetings from Highland Place!

Numbers in our Women's League have been depleted of late – averaging about 12 members per meeting but, considering the weather, that is understandable. We have missed a few 'speakers' but have filled our time with Musical Choices; Storytelling and heated debates!!

February 2014 will long be remembered as the month in which our oldest and brightest star passed away. Gwladys Rees was a role model to us all—always beautifully dressed and always cheerful. She had an opinion on everything and was generous to a fault. Gwladys was an inspiration to us all – she was a 'one-off'. Our light in Aberdare has been dimmed but, to quote Gwladys herself, '*think positively and carry on*' — after all, she did take a course in practical psychology as she always reminded us. Psychology, Beauty, Modelling, Gwladys had taken a course in them all and a few more I am sure!

A measure of the esteem in which Gwladys was held was the presence at her funeral of so many representatives from our Cefncoed and Cardiff congregations.

Someone said, "that was the happiest funeral I have ever been to." But that was Gwladys wasn't it? — So, Gwladys, thanks for the memories – you will long give us much to smile about.

Christine Roberts is progressing slowly but still smiling! Edna Jones is confined to the house now after a series of falls and broken limbs. Iris Davies too, is confined to the house, being on oxygen. We wish them all well and mention them every Wednesday and Sunday—asking for reports on their progress.

Mrs Marion Davies has had a cataract removed recently – she is missed at church and at League to which I hope she will soon return.

Eric Jones and Anne are going through a difficult time at the moment so I hope things will improve soon – they are missed very much both at Church and Women's League.

Reading through this 'item' it seems to be a catalogue of problems – and yet, in spite of everything, we are still maintaining our enthusiasm and look forward to Spring. As I write this I can see snowdrops, daffodils and irises through my window! Hope springs eternal!!

Best wishes,
Marian Whippey

2014 Annual Lecture at Highland Place – Thursday June 26th at 7pm

The Annual Lecture in June 2014 will be given by Dr Martin Wright who currently lectures in History at Cardiff University, where he specialises in the labour and radical history of Wales and Britain.

Dr Wright was born in Northampton which he describes as "a centre of old radicalism". He moved to Wales in 1984 to go to University in Lampeter, and has lived in Wales ever since. He studied history to masters' level at Lampeter, and subsequently worked in the Extra Mural Department of the University of Wales at Aberystwyth, where he taught history and served as Head of Continuing Education. Since leaving Aberystwyth in 2004, he has worked for the Universities of Huddersfield, Lampeter and Cardiff, researching and teaching history. Martin completed his PhD at Cardiff in 2011.

The title of his lecture is '**Wales and Socialism since the 1880s**'.

When I asked him what had prompted his particular interest in Welsh Social History he explained that his commitment to socialism has deep roots which he has held since the early 1980s and moreover, to a love of Wales which goes back to his childhood. Dr Wright is an excellent lecturer who has a passion for his subject which is infectious.

The Lecture is free and *anyone* who is interested will be welcome. Please feel at liberty to bring this event to the notice of anyone outside Unitarian 'circles' who might also like to attend.

Ella Lewis-Jones

CARDIFF UNITARIANS / UNODIAID CAERDYDD

Cardiff Unitarians have decided to continue experimenting with a new style of service.

It is felt that in order to survive we must adapt to a new style of worship. The new style involves the congregation sitting in a semi-circle to pray, meditate, listen to readings and music and sing together.

It is striking in our modern age how few people attend religious practice. There are many reasons for this — the growth in leisure activities, television, consumerism etc. However, in a fast changing world there is still a need for us all to have a sanctuary to escape to where we can meet and worship together in fellowship.

On 16th February Cardiff Unitarians held a joint service with the Cardiff Buddhist Centre. A Buddhist disciple called Pramudita came to address the congregation. He explained the four Noble Truths of Buddhism:

- The first Noble Truth is the physical and mental suffering associated with birth, growing old and dying.
- The second is craving for sense-pleasures – this is craving for sense objects which provide pleasant feelings.
- The third is the cessation of suffering and the causes of suffering. Cessation is the goal of one's spiritual practice in the Buddhist tradition. According to the Buddhist point of view, once we have developed a genuine understanding of the causes of suffering, such as craving, then we can be free from suffering.
- The fourth is 'the path to the cessation'. This path is considered to be the essence of Buddhist practice. The eightfold path consists of: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

On St David's Day our Sunday Club explored the theme of sharing and kindness. The children were blindfolded and they had to help each other in preventing each other from walking into things.

We would like to congratulate three members of the Sunday Club. Sisters Lili and Hannah Bianchi Jones had success in an ice skating competition at the National Skating Rink in Cardiff. Lili came first in her section in "Figure Skating" and was awarded a silver cup. Hannah also received a silver medal in her section for "Figure Skating".

The third member, Logan Bianchi Jones, achieved his green stripe in "Taekwando"
Well done gang!

On Wednesday February 12th, Dewi and Sarah attended a joint event titled - "Red Hands Day" - which was organised between UNA Cardiff and District and CND Cymru. A talk was delivered by Owen Everet on the subject of "Should we allow the military to recruit in Schools." It was chaired by Aled Edwards the Chief Executive of "Cytun" (an umbrella body that represents Churches in Wales) who thanked the Unitarian Community for their work in this field. Other denominations are also involved in this campaign. Prior to this, on Wednesday 22nd January, Dewi and Sarah attended a meeting titled 'Crisis in Gaza' held jointly between UNA Cardiff and District and Palestine Solidarity Campaign. The guest speaker was Ben Alofs – a Medic and Peace Activist.

At the AGM of the South East Wales Unitarian Women's League held at Highland Place Aberdare on March 26th, Diana Bianchi was installed as District President and Lis Dyson-Jones was voted to the post of Secretary/Minute Secretary. A wonderful spread was prepared by our sisters from Cefn.

Dewi Owen, Development Officer

CEFNCOE

Women's League

The New Year came in with a vengeance – Rain, Rain, Rain. We planned to have our first League meeting on 5th February but the weather was too bad. As we only meet every other week we had just one February meeting – on the 19th. (It happened to be my 59th Wedding Anniversary.) In March we've started planning to make our meetings more interesting this year.

We attended the District League Meeting at Aberdare on 26th March, where we were in charge of the food and the raffle. This was the last meeting presided over by our member Marian Lewis whose two-year term of office has now ended: the in-coming President is Diana Bianchi of Cardiff. It was an enjoyable afternoon. The only thing *is* - the schoolroom at Highland Place is so lovely that I always leave there feeling down-hearted that the facilities at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd are not of the same high standard. I would be so pleased to have the planned upgrade of our vestry become a reality.

Vera Tomsett

Charity Donation

The charity box on display over the Christmas/New Year period raised £160. Our two usual charities, Tŷ Hafan and Latch, have each received a cheque for £80.

A Welcome Visitor

On a number of Sundays we have been very pleased to have the company of a young man from Pontypool at our service having discovered Unitarianism (and the Hen Dŷ Cwrdd) on the Internet. Travel is not all that straightforward so we appreciate the trouble it takes him to be with us. We hope he will continue to visit when convenient.

Graveyard Wall

As reported in an earlier issue of the newsletter, a section of the graveyard wall is in a poor state – with the estimated cost of repair being in excess of twenty thousand pounds. Our application to the Welsh Church Act Fund for financial assistance has been successful. Another funding source is currently evaluating our application for help—we're keeping our fingers crossed!

Joint Service

We were pleased to welcome friends from Aberdare and Cardiff to Hen Dŷ Cwrdd on Sunday, 2nd March for a service on the theme 'What has life taught you so far?'

Useful Publicity

An interesting article in the Western Mail of 10th March, relating to the restoration of Yr Hen Gapel at Llwynrhydowen, later gave rise to the inclusion in a subsequent edition of that newspaper of a letter drawing attention to the historical significance of Yr Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefncoed. The letter writer was Lyndon Harris of Llandeilo who is a descendant of Siôn Llewelyn, one of the founders of our chapel in 1747. (See November 2013 issue of the newsletter.)

Lyndon's letter was seen by Christine Moore, Development Officer of the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust – the body now responsible for Llwynrhydowen and also Yr Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon. As a result, Christine was keen to see our chapel and learn something of its history, so a visit was arranged for the afternoon of 2nd April when she was accompanied by D Leslie Davies whose history of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Trecynon has recently been published. They stayed for almost three hours and enjoyed their visit – especially as they had the opportunity of meeting with members of the Women's League and experiencing their hospitality.

Ken Morgan

NOTTAGE

At the beginning of January Julianne conducted a service for us and Caitlin McAdam (Delydd's daughter) was visiting. Caitlin brought her clarinet with her and treated us to a lovely solo. As well as the clarinet Caitlin plays the piano, and is a chorister at Bristol Cathedral. In July Caitlin will go to Poland to sing with the Bristol Cathedral on tour and in September will take up a place in Bristol Cathedral Choir School. As well as being very talented, she works very hard at her school and music work and well deserves her position.

Gwladys Howell has struggled for the past three years of ill health to stay in her own home, but this became no longer possible at the end of January, and she moved into the Edward Albert Court in Porthcawl for residential care. She obviously misses her own home, but has adjusted very well, and is looking really good on the care given. She misses chapel, and when not with us in person, is always with us in spirit, and we look forward to some better weather which will enable her to join us once more.

Jennifer Evans has been one of our "regulars" for years, but because of ill health has not been able to join us since the first Sunday of the year. She was our "tea maker" every week and did so much more for the chapel, always being enthusiastic, and full of suggestions and practical help. It is a big shock for us all that her ill health will prevent her from attending as she used to, but we look forward to seeing her whenever she feels able to join us, and all send her our love and best wishes.

Avril Protheroe

TREBANOS

Capel y Graig and the G&G Action Team

A new maintenance team has been established to undertake work on all three buildings – Gellionnen Chapel, Graig Chapel and Graig Hall.

Membership is free and is drawn from all who believe in our flame of a Free, Tolerant and Liberal faith burning brightly in here in the Swansea Valley.

The team, called the *G&G Action Group*, guarantees to find unpaid work for all its members – work which is suitable for everyone and will match their experience, qualifications, age and sex gender.

It was established three months ago and has already made a significant impact on the life of our church.

The achievements to date include:

Gellionnen Chapel

The chapel's vestry has been cleared and tidied, walls painted and kitchen-units installed. The units were given for chapel use by Lewis Rees. The work included the fitting of a new wooden floor and the old vestry is now looking spick and span.

Considerable efforts continue to be made to combat the many problems we have experienced with flooding where the old drainage system has been inadequate during times of heavy incessant rain. A comprehensive and integrated system is now being designed and it is hoped that it will be installed before the next spate of bad weather of continuous rain.

Graig Chapel

The recent fitting of plastic seals between all window frames and their stone reveals completes the exterior work and painting of the outside of the main structure.

Major repairs have been completed on the central heating chimney flue. It is now OK, following a test run and check for flue gas leaks.

Two bardic chairs, gifted to our chapel in 1950 by Llanorfab Jones, have been repaired, treated for woodworm, cleaned and re-polished to their original pristine condition. They now occupy pride of place in out '*Sêf fawr*' again.

Our outside notice board which overlooks Graig Road has now been updated, cleaned and repainted

Graig Hall

Work continues in clearing and tidying the interior. Much rubbish and unwanted books have been disposed of.

Arrangements are in hand to obtain quotations for rewiring all the electrics and their reinstatement to a new meter and power source.

Quotations are also being obtained to treat all the woodwork for woodworm.

Colin Morgan

GELLIONNEN

Our sympathy goes to Martin Edwards whose father has died peacefully aged well into his nineties. Our very good wishes go also to Martin who retired at the end of March from a career in intensive care nursing. He is a man of many parts and will no doubt have much that continues to occupy him.

The kitchen clearout was quite effective. Getting rid of "stuff" can be difficult up on Gellionnen Mountain and we are always grateful to those who will fill their car boots or even bring up a trailer. It is much easier now to make a cup of tea. Also, we've been treated for woodworm!

Our fingerpost sign pointing towards the chapel was blown so vigorously by high winds recently that it came loose and fell down. The sign has been returned to our local council offices with the hope that it be quickly reinstated. After the laying of the gas pipeline the signpost was not replaced for a number of years. Persistent requests eventually meant that a smart new sign went up – we hope it is speedily replaced.

The moles have been very busy in our graveyard. Jane Carpenter, when smoothing out the molehills actually met a member of our mole family. Jane was glad to say that it was unharmed despite her vigorous activities. Daffodils which have naturally multiplied over the years are looking good – we have several different sorts.

Sadly, Sarah Jones has handed in her resignation as our secretary. Over a very short period of time she has put in significant amounts of work, she has put in much thought, practical effort, knowledge and experience. Sarah, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

In July, on Saturday the 12th, the Village Quire will perform in Gellionnen Chapel. They are a superb four part choir of twelve voices who sing unaccompanied. Their programme is entitled 'Precious Bane' and is based on a novel by Mary Webb. Their accompanying professional actor Phil Smith will take his readings from 'Precious Bane'. I have seen/heard this performance and look forward to seeing it again. We hope that people might consider coming at around 5 o'clock bringing with them a picnic tea. There will be Welsh trad. music first of all, provided by local talent and then we'll follow with the Village Quire. We are promising a beautiful sunny day, so an organised bus trip or car outing wouldn't be a bad idea.

Marian Littlepage

WICK

Wick Chapel grounds are looking particularly beautiful this Spring. The primroses have multiplied and at least four varieties of daffodils are growing in clumps all around. Perhaps the rain has done some good for the trees and flowers. Our yew tree also looks good.

We are trying some differently themed services, with a welcome to Spring service, a family service with teddy bears especially invited – and quite a few turned up... and a 'wider family service' which has enabled us to collect items for the Porthcawl Food Bank once again. Our Easter Service will be held on Easter Sunday at 3pm. A warm welcome awaits anyone who is able to join us.

Julianne Morgan

Men's Group

For a group of men from our congregations at Aberdare, Cardiff and Cefncoed the 'First Tuesday in the month' now quickly gets circled-in on calendars and in diaries, reserving it (at least the late morning and early afternoon) for a male-only activity – The Men's Group. (Have no fears—it's not the least bit sexist!)

The group has come about at the suggestion of Rev Eric Jones who, as a former minister of the three congregations, wishes to preserve a link between them – other than that of the Women's League.

Each gathering involves a visit to an interesting location, followed by a meal. Our first venture, last November, was a visit to Aberdare museum, this was followed in December by a Christmas lunch at the 'Navigation' at Abercynon. In February we visited Castell Coch.

Our most recent outing was a sightseeing stroll around Merthyr Tydfil town centre, ending at the recently restored Old Town Hall for lunch and taking in a number of interesting sites along the way. These included two with a particular Unitarian significance – Thomastown Unitarian Chapel and the Vulcan House.

It should be pointed out that the 'first Tuesday in April' happened to be April 1st – April Fools' Day – which helps to explain why only *some* of the group were available for the photo-shoot outside Thomastown chapel—others were riding up and down on escalators and playing hide-and-seek in a Tesco super-store. (Nothing more needs to be said!)

Thomastown chapel was built in 1901 (the date can be seen carved above the left-hand entrance) replacing the earlier (1821) Twynyrodyn chapel. Thomastown chapel was closed in the nineteen-sixties and subsequently sold to the SNU Spiritualist Church. Sadly this use has now ended and the building sits looking quite forlorn awaiting replacement of the lead roof over the porch recently stripped by vandals.



Unitarian Chapel, Lower Thomas Street

Photo: Keith Lewis-Jones



Tony Foster, Alun Watts, Phil Griffiths, Mog Chambers

Within the building is a tablet in memory of Rev David John, minister of the nearby (now demolished) Twynnyrodyn chapel.

David John expressed sympathy with the Chartists and his son Matthew was a leading figure in the movement. It was to Matthew's home, Vulcan House, that we later made our way.



Vulcan House

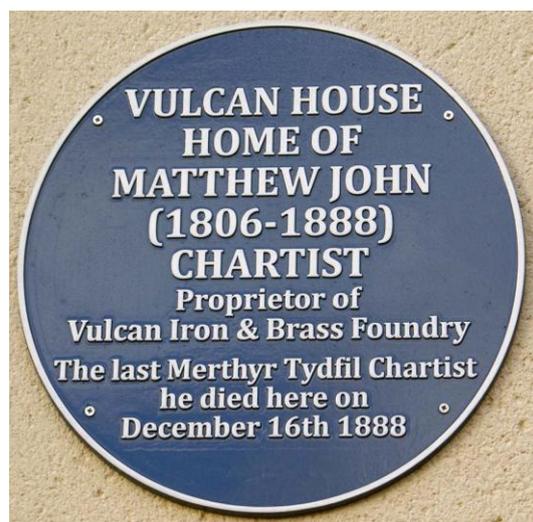
Photo: Keith Lewis-Jones

Vulcan House, built in the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth century, served as residence fronting a quite extensive brewery, later to become an iron and brass foundry when occupied by Matthew John in 1868.

The building fell into disrepair but the recent development of the site by Wales and West, building developers has retained the impressive façade.

Matthew's great-great grandson Lyndon Harris (see also Cefncoed news, above) informs me that David and Matthew John are buried at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd graveyard.

Ken Morgan



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Copy-deadline for the next issue of the *South East Wales Unitarian News* is **Saturday 31 May 2014**. Items for publication should be sent by to:- kenneth.morgan25@tesco.net or Ken Morgan, 25c Holford Street, Cefn Coed y Cymer, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 2RW. Tel: 01685 379016