



FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday 10 April to Thursday 13 April 2017 – GA Meetings at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole
Saturday 18 March 2017 – copy deadline for the next issue of the District News.

REV WYN THOMAS

We are sorry to report that the Rev. Wyn Thomas, minister to the Llandysyl Group of Churches, was involved in a car accident on January 18th. He has suffered some fractures and torn ligaments and is a patient at Glangwili Hospital, Carmarthen. We understand that he is making good progress and we wish him a speedy recovery. No-one else was involved in the accident.

DISTRICT CHRISTMAS SERVICE



Photo: Stephanie John



Photo: Joy Foster

The 2016 District Christmas Service of Readings and Carols was held at Gellionnen Chapel at 11am on Sunday 4th December. The service was led by District President Tony Foster, with Lawrence Bowen providing the music at the piano. The familiar format of carols, interspersed with readings (this year on the theme of 'Light') presented by a reader from each congregation, was arranged by District Secretary Lis Dyson-Jones.

[See also *'From the President'* below.]

FROM THE DISTRICT PRESIDENT

I would like to wish everyone a belated Happy New Year. 2017 has got off to a cold start so I hope you are all managing to keep warm and well. I am pleased so many of you were able to support District events in 2016, I feel it is important that we are able to come together as often as possible and your support is vital.

The District Carol service is an excellent example. It was so pleasing to see so many of you at Gellionnen chapel on a cold but fine December morning. Early arrivals were able to take advantage of sitting in pews that had newly installed heating pipes. It was a thoroughly enjoyable occasion with three ministers present, Rev Eric Jones, Rev Lewis Rees and Rev Maud Robinson. I was seated in front of the congregation so I can assure you that the singing was excellent. My thanks go to Maud Robinson for the meditation, to Lawrence Bowen for playing the piano, to Lis Dyson-Jones for all the arrangements,

to everyone who took part with readings and candle lighting and to members of Gellionnen for their hard work in providing us with an excellent buffet.

Although numbers are still small in our chapels, my thanks go to congregation members throughout the District, who are working hard to turn things around and this was evident at Gellionnen. I hope we are able, as congregations and as a District, to continue to work hard in 2017 to come up with ideas to boost our congregation numbers, as I feel that in the current climate Unitarianism is more relevant than ever.

Tony Foster

FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE UNITARIAN WELSH DEPARTMENT

Blwyddyn Newydd Dda! Happy New Year!

The dawn of a new year always offers the opportunity to look back on the year that has just passed, and to reflect on how it went in general, what worked, what didn't and what can be done to make the coming year a success. When I look back on 2016 I am astounded at how much the Unitarians achieved in just 12 months! I'm also very proud of our achievements and very excited about the possibilities for the future.

During the past year I have been very privileged to represent the Unitarians at so many diverse places and given the opportunity to present our movement to so many different groups of people. Reading back through the diary for 2016 I'm reminded of the visit to the House of Lords, the state opening of the Assembly at Y Senedd, the Faith seminar at Dyfed Powys police HQ, the National Eisteddfod week at Abergavenny, the Interfaith council events etc.

However, the events that give me the greatest personal pleasure are the ones within the movement. The conference, the rally, the trip, the services, – and even the meetings to a certain extent. The breadth of the work that you as members have undertaken during the past year has been amazing, and the amount of charitable work that goes on quietly is something that you should be extremely proud of. In just over the space of a year three ministerial vacancies were filled in Wales. We wish Rev Lewis Rees and his congregation at Nottage, and Rev Alun-Wyn Dafis and the congregation of Brondeifi every success over the coming year. However, it is sad to hear that, for personal reasons, Rev Maud Robinson has had to tender her resignation and will no longer be able to minister to Cardiff Unitarians beyond the end of March.

So what about 2017? What can we look forward to? Well, one important event on the calendar will be the very special GA meetings, when we will be presenting the opening ceremony for the first time. I hope that many of you will not only attend, but also agree to take part. The ceremony will be held at 8 o'clock on Monday April 10th and if you are able and willing to take part please get in touch with Megan Jones at meganjones@advantage.mail.co.uk or by telephoning her on 01970 61 2768 as soon as possible.

The next year promises to be another exciting and busy one and I'm looking forward to it with confidence. I look forward especially to sharing some more good times in the company of people who I now consider to be friends. On behalf of Unitarians Wales I wish you all a very happy, prosperous and healthy New Year and offer my sincere gratitude to you all for all that you do throughout every year.

Melda Grantham

GA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE KEY MESSAGES 14 NOVEMBER 2016

1. Next Steps - Training and Education Development Project

Rachel Skelton presented a report on the project which officially commenced on 1 October 2016. Lots of preparatory work has taken place to clarify governance, support and communication structures for this important work. She had been in touch with many of those involved in training and education within the Denomination and will be in contact with others who need to be involved.

The key objective is to deliver a Denomination-wide framework for training, education, and spiritual and professional development which is effective, coherent and sustainable. A workshop will take place at the next Annual Meetings to feedback on progress and gather views.

2. Next steps - Web-based Spiritual Development & Learning Resource

The Executive Committee gave approval to proceed with commissioning an external agency to design and build a web-based spiritual development and learning resource which is one of the Next Steps priorities. It is intended to attract, and meet the needs of, all those searching online - not simply current Unitarians - and is being taken forward in partnership with Unitarian College Manchester. It will be funded by the

proceeds of the Collection that was taken during the Anniversary Service at this year's Annual Meetings and the plan is to demonstrate an early version of this web resource at the Annual Meetings next year.

3. Next Steps – Identity

The Next Steps process concluded that work needed to be undertaken to develop a comprehensive response to explaining our identity. The Executive Committee agreed to take forward a project to seek external professional support to enable the Unitarian identity and underlying ethos to be explored and developed into concrete actions. A workshop will be held at the next Annual Meetings.

4. Next Steps – Financial Sustainability

A report was received from Robert Ince and Philip Colfox drawing upon research they had undertaken to review financial and building sustainability of congregations and the wider Unitarian and Free Christian Movement. The next steps are to look at ways of supporting congregations, particularly identifying opportunities and Simon Bland, new Ministry and Congregational Support Officer will take the work forward.

5. Sustentation Fund

The Sustentation Fund provides about £20,000 a year in grants to congregations to support Ministries and is separately registered with the Charity Commission but with Trustees appointed by the General Assembly. The Executive Committee agreed to a request from the Fund's Trustees that a proposal for merger with the General Assembly be pursued which will, if approved, reduce the administrative and financial burdens. Grants to congregations would not be affected.

6. Investment Management

Advice from the General Assembly's legal advisers on the current investment management arrangements was considered. In response, it was agreed that advice should be taken from a qualified investment adviser on investments and to review the current investment policy and ongoing requirements.

7. Nightingale Centre Budget 2016/17

The Budget for the Nightingale Centre for the year beginning 1 October 2016 was approved. The Budget will underpin further improvements to the Centre, building on the success of 2015/16 when the Centre achieved its highest income ever.

THOUGHT FOR NOW

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

Never be sad for what is over, be glad it once was yours. *Anon*

ABERDARE

A very Happy New Year to all in the District from Highland Place.

The Christmas season was very successful. All the windows in Highland Place Church were decorated by the groups who use our schoolroom. The Brownies, Vibes Foundry Town Brass Band, U3A Gardening Group, and Highland Place Meditation Group and also a class from Caradog Primary School. They all created very impressive window displays. Our thanks to all the groups for adding to the Christmas atmosphere. We hope to maintain these links with the community for future events.

The ReChoir concert held on the 18th December was very well attended with the church almost full with many visitors from across the UK. It was good to see friends from Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefncoed present. Once again Nathan Jones and his Choir gave an excellent performance which was enjoyed by all. Refreshments were served in a very full schoolroom after the concert.

It was delightful to see new faces and old friends at our Christmas Eve service. A Muslim couple from Birmingham enjoyed the carols and readings from members of the congregation. We look forward to them joining us again in the future.

Joy and Tony Foster took donations from the congregation to the Merthyr/Cynon Valley Food bank in Gurnos, a very humbling experience. Our grateful thanks to all who give so generously to this much-needed charity.

Our Monday Coffee Mornings continue to be well supported. We hope to reach out to more members of the public in 2017 as we know there are many lonely people in the area who would benefit from some company and friendship, even if it is just for two hours on a Monday morning.

The Monday afternoon Meditation sessions, led by Joy Foster, are proving popular with over a dozen regular attenders.

We are looking for a volunteer or two who would like to lead any of the following:

A Reading Group, a Walking Group, a Crafts/Knitting Group, a Mother and Toddler group, either weekly or monthly, in the schoolroom. Don't be shy ... why not give it a try?

Tony Foster

Women's League

Highland Place has had a busy autumn enjoying a variety of talks including the history of the Romanov family and the last Tsar of Russia and updates from our charity representatives. There have been quizzes, afternoons of music and poetry choices, craft and chat afternoons and demonstrations on Book Art and Sugarcraft. Some good retail therapy is always a favourite as an annual visit to M&S reveals!

Food plays quite an important part of our League life with lunching out and 'in-house' afternoon tea scoring highly. Christmas gatherings with carols and sharing are always a joy.

We all look forward to the coming year and already have our programme plans in place. We send warmest greetings to members throughout the District and wish you all, a very Happy New Year.

Lis Dyson-Jones

CARDIFF UNITARIANS / UNDOIDIAID CAERDYDD

Blwyddyn Newydd Dda to all our friends in the District.

We welcomed our new Minister, the Rev Maud Robinson as she began her ministry with us, on Sunday 6th November last year. She has been an inspiration to us all and we feel blessed. Despite being few in number we have appreciated her dedicated, optimistic approach and the Christmas service on 18th December was a true delight. Several children took part and were given gifts from under the tree. It is with understandable sadness, therefore, that for personal reasons Maud has had to tender her resignation and will no longer be able to minister to us after the end of March. She will be very much missed and saying goodbye will not be easy.

During the last service in December we were able to wish Win John 'Pen Blwydd Hapus' on her 90th birthday and it was good to see Caroline Boyce at our first service of the year on January 1st during her Christmas holiday break from teaching English as a foreign language to students in Spain. She is finding her new challenge enjoyable and regaled us with stories of Spanish schools and students.

We have had some good news about the health of Marjorie Collins who has been in Llandough hospital for several months battling, among other things, pneumonia. Her health has improved so much since Christmas that it is hoped, with appropriate support in place Marjorie will soon be able to return home.

The next meetings for the United Nations Association (Cardiff and District) are:

- Joint meeting with UNA Cardiff and Cardiff Quakers will take place at the Friend's Meeting House, Cardiff on Friday 10th February at 7 pm. The meeting will be addressed by Daniel Cullen (Quaker peace and Social Witness) and the topic will be 'Human Rights and the children of Prisoners'.
- A meeting on 'Crisis in Yemen' addressed by Ali Saif, Director of Yemen Relief and Matt Hemsley, Campaign Manager, Oxfam, Cardiff will take place on Thursday 2nd March at the Temple of Peace, Cardiff.
- A meeting addressing the issue of Climate Change will take place on Wednesday 15th March at the Temple of Peace (7pm). The speakers will be Dr Hannah Hughes (Cardiff University) and Jessica McQuade of World Wildlife Fund Wales

The snow goose need not bathe to make itself white. Neither need you be anything but yourself.'
(Lao-Tse)

Lis Dyson-Jones

CEFNCOED

Women's League

We were pleased to welcome Elaine James to our league meeting on 9th November. Elaine, who is a Community Co-ordinator on the staff of Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT), gave an interesting and informative presentation on "*aids, adaptations and safety equipment to produce independence and safety at home.*" She also gave information on what is available locally in the way of social activities and groups for those aged 50+. (Elaine can be contacted on 07580 866547 or at elaine.james@vamt.net)

Eleven of us travelled to Maesycwmmmer, Caerphilly on 6th December for our Christmas Lunch which was held at the Bryn Meadows Hotel & Spa. The 3-course lunch was excellent, so too was the entertainment—a Frank Sinatra tribute show. Frank's hit songs kept us entertained for two hours—singing along to a number of them: a few of us even ventured onto the dance floor! (Talk about 'Strictly'!) The opportunity to pamper ourselves by experiencing the relaxing facilities available at the luxury boutique spa was very tempting—but our minibus arrived to take us home.

On 14th December our usual afternoon meeting was cancelled and instead a few of us met in the morning to erect and decorate the Christmas Tree and to give the chapel a seasonal look.

Roy Lewis

As reported in the November issue, we were saddened by the death on 31 October of our faithful member Roy Lewis, aged 78. There was a large gathering at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd on 10 November for Roy's funeral which was conducted by Rev Eric Jones, with burial at Cefncoed Cemetery. As a young man, Roy was a regular serviceman in the Parachute Regiment and in his eulogy Eric referred to an incident in Kenya in April 1961 when the aeroplane dropping supplies to Roy and his comrades tragically crashed into a mountain. Roy received recognition for the vital role he played in the rescue of four airmen injured in the crash,

[An account of the part Roy played in the rescue of the airmen is given below. It includes a letter from the then War Minister, John Profumo and a newspaper article of the time. See – '*South Wales soldier hero of rescue in jungle.*']

Remembrance Sunday

On Sunday 13 November the annual Remembrance Ceremony at the village War Memorial at 11am was followed by the Community Remembrance Service at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd. Both services were conducted by Ken Morgan, a role he has performed annually since 1974. Major Stephen Price, MBE marshalled the parade through the village and presented a reading during the service at the chapel.

District Christmas Service

Members much enjoyed their morning visit to Gellionnen Chapel on Sunday, 4 December for the annual District Service of Readings and Carols. We were grateful for the warm drink provided on our arrival and very much appreciated the luxury of heated pews. Cefncoed readers were Gwynfa Bowen and Vera Tomsett. Our thanks to Gellionnen congregation for their welcome.

Services over the Holiday period

Over the holiday period our services consisted of readings presented by members of the congregation. On 18 December we considered 'How Christmas is celebrated in different parts of the world', and on 1 January the theme was (unsurprisingly) 'The New Year'.

The service at 11am on Christmas morning was led by YYY Men – Alan Bush, Morgan Chambers and Ken Morgan. These 'three wise men' may possibly have recorded a significant 'first' in the history of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd in that the trio presenting the service shared the **same birthday** – though *not* (as the youngest of them points out) the same birth-date.

In our thoughts

We wish 'Happy Birthday' to Hetty Corcoran who celebrates her 90th birthday on 27 January.

Arthur Saunders is suffering from shingles and has not been very well recently. Over the past few weeks we have missed having a visit from him. We hear from his wife, Marian that he is a little better, but rather weak. We also miss Marlene Aubrey, Gwynfa Bowen, Megan Lewis and Iris Morris who are unable to attend service at present. We send our best wishes to them all and look forward to seeing them at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd again soon.

Ken Morgan

NOTTAGE

We had a very busy few months before the end of the year. In October we held a coffee morning to raise funds for 'Epilepsy Action', with the proceeds from that, and money collected during the year in collection boxes in our schoolroom, Lewis was able to send a cheque for £250 to the organisation. In November Lewis conducted a well attended, thoughtful tribute to those who have lost their lives in service during conflicts abroad. The three main Services in the UK were well represented by Lewis who was in the Navy, Harry Hales, who was in the RAF, and Ken Gadd who made a career in the Army, and retired as a Regimental Sergeant Major in the Royal Staffords.

Also in November we were invited to attend, and provide readers, for a multi-faith service in the local Catholic Church. Unfortunately Lewis was away on the evening chosen, so Jean Thomas and myself were the readers. The service was to show support, and to send love to the many refugees arriving in and around the small islands off Italy, and in particular Lampedusa, where the village carpenter had given up making furniture, and was making crosses from the driftwood of wrecked boats to demonstrate the devastation of lives lost by people seeking help and peace. Seven churches took part and 40-50 people gathered to show their support on a cold, dark evening. We were invited to write on notes our messages of hope to the survivors. I wrote *'you are in the prayers of friends all around the world'*, I hope you will include them in yours.

In December we raised money for Crisis at Christmas again. This is the 3rd year Helen Steele has kindly collected money so that somebody in need could enjoy a warm, comfortable day at Christmas. The first year we raised enough money from our small congregation to ensure 1 person would be lucky, the 2nd year it was 2, and the 3rd time it was more than 3. We boosted the collection with a coffee morning, and raffled a home-made cushion, which Jean Thomas won.

Our own Christmas service and lunch was very well attended, which was pleasing as we'd had such a busy, successful year. Sadly, with illness we were not able to sustain this to the beginning of this year, so we send our love and best wishes to Rose Owen, June Pattimore and Jean Thomas. GET WELL SOON!

Avril Protheroe

SWANSEA

It was a busy season of Christmas concerts in December. Members of the Swansea congregation enjoyed taking part in the District Carol Service held at Gellionnen and in the Christmas Eve service also held there. Thanks to the Gellionnen congregation for their welcome at both events.

Swansea's own Carol Service was taken by Julianne Morgan and the congregation took part in the readings and poems. As part of our awareness of the plight of the homeless community in Swansea, we donated food and clothing as part of the service and this was taken to a local organisation who ensured the donations reached those in need.

The Christmas Crib was once more placed in the entrance to the church. This year Stephen Wilson produced a new track of Carols and seasonal songs which played during the day and evening and cheered up those shoppers in the High Street. Thanks to the donations of the generous public we will be able to give Wales Air Ambulance Service a total of £180.

As some of you may know, there is a lot of regeneration work in hand to make the High Street in Swansea a more welcoming place with a focus on changing some of the old and decrepit buildings into creative spaces housing small theatres, food outlets, etc. We are hoping that this work will encourage more people to stop and have a look at the lovely building which houses our church – and maybe, even pop in.

And now – A Great Grandparent Alert! Many congratulations to Lynn and Margaret Evans. Their granddaughter Hannah, gave birth to Madison Arianwen on New Year's Eve. Baby, Mother, Grandparents and Great Grandparents are all doing well.

Kirsteen Reed

TREBANOS

TREBANOS MIXED CHOIR

Trebanos Choir ran its course for well over forty years. It came into existence as the result of a planned District Cymanfa Ganu to take place at the Graig Chapel. People enjoyed practising for the Cymanfa so

much that Lawrence was asked to set up a local choir. He was the only conductor for the whole of that time, taking choristers through requiems, madrigals, music ancient and modern. I often hear music these days and am transported back to concerts of the past. He guided us and coaxed us through the practices and challenged us a great deal too.

Those of us still living locally look forward to our annual get together at the Graig Chapel. In December we met once more to share news and to sing. We are indebted to Lawrence. A charity collection nominated by him was made for Kidney Research in affectionate memory of Lyn Hutchings, brother-in-law of Monica and Lawrence Bowen who died recently. Thank you Lawrence, and thank you Monica for always supporting us.

GELLIONNEN

We were proud to host the District Christmas Service and happy to see how many friends took up the invitation. We had decorated the chapel "very greenly" with holly and ivy, laurel and rosemary and olive and a little mistletoe.

December is not the best time of the year to be celebrating your birthday but there were two very special ones—Harri Evans Mason had his eighteenth and cousin Gwennan Evans her thirteenth. May you both have a marvellous year.

Julie Nedin's morning service of lessons and carols was new and an effort to provide celebration for those not wanting to attend midnight Christmas service. It was much appreciated, but at one stage it looked as though we might have no one to accompany our carolling. Rhys Jones and Rory Castle Jones quickly made it known on Gellionnen's Facebook that a pianist was needed, and back came a reply from Ann Jameson saying, "I am a musician living in Pontardawe and would be happy to help you out." Ann accompanied us on the keyboard and also played for us a medley of carols on her cello. The cello solo was stunning.

Midnight service once again brought out our musicians and some new faces in the congregation.

Our greenery remained up until 8th January when the Mari Lwyd came knocking at the door. The Mari Lwyd team is based in Ystradgynlais and over recent years has forged a great reputation. Ours was the last of their public performances but we heard that they had eighteen school visits to make before packing Mari away for next winter! Gellionnen Chapel stands on a site of pre-Christian worship and it is good to be continuing with this ancient tradition. The short closing address was delivered with great verve by the Rev Wyn Thomas and Melda Grantham paid the Mari Lwyd with a bag of gold (chocolate) coins. It was good to have them with us on this once a year occasion.

We've hear that Aneurin Jones is to continue his musical studies next year at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He is already a very well seasoned and travelled performer.

We look forward to the forthcoming visits of our pulpit supplies and wish everyone health and happiness in the coming months.

Hwyl fawr.

Marian Littlepage

WICK

Our Christmas Service was very well attended, with great support from the village. I was so pleased to welcome them all after last year's cancellation at such short notice. No hospital stay this December! Everyone took part in some way, making our service a true family occasion.

We send love and best wishes to Rachel and Eugene Dodd in Australia, on the birth of their daughter Eliza Helen, and look forward to seeing them when they 'come home' for their next visit..

Our New Year service was on the theme of Hope:
Hope opens doors ... where despair closes them.
Hope discovers what can be done ... instead of grumbling about what cannot.
Hope looks for the good in people ... instead of harping on the worst.
Hope lights a candle ... instead of cursing the darkness.

A Happy, Healthy and Hopeful 2017 to you all.

Julianne Morgan

SOUTH WALES SOLDIER HERO OF RESCUE IN JUNGLE

(See Cefncoed news)

Letter from John Profumo to Roy's parents

War Office, Whitehall, London, SW1 20 April, 1961

Dear Mr and Mrs Lewis

Recently I carried out a tour of the troops in the Middle East and had the pleasure of being able to take your Son and some of his comrades in my aeroplane from Tripoli back to their Battalion in Cyprus.

I expect he has told you all about their experiences during their adventure in Kenya when the aeroplane which was supplying them tragically crashed.

Your Son did truly wonderful work in the rescue operation and you must rightly feel very proud of him. I was delighted to have the opportunity of meeting him and congratulating him.

John Profumo

South Wales Echo

Cefn Coed paratrooper Private Royston Lewis, aged 21, received a "Well done" handshake from War minister Mr John Profumo for his heroism during a rescue operation in a Kenya mountain jungle.

Royston made what senior officers called an "outstanding feat" in covering a normal five-hour journey in 1¾ hours to bring help to four injured airmen.

The airmen crashed into a mountain while taking part in an air supply drop.

First-aid was immediately rendered by the paratroopers who were on "adventure training" in the area, and Private Lewis was sent to warn the police and rescue organisations.

The paratroopers improvised stretchers, and eventually the injured men were carried to safety. "The journey took 11 hours, but the men were saved," said the leader. "Private Lewis did an excellent job. Not only did he accomplish the descent quickly, but his path was through extremely rough, wild game infested jungle."

Mr Profumo later met the paratroopers in Libya. He chatted informally to the party and gave a special 'Well done' handshake to Private Lewis, whose parents live at Maes-y-Garreg, Cefn Coed, near Merthyr.

Ken Morgan



PHOTO GALLERY

Nathan Jones and ReChoir before their concert at Highland Place, Aberdare.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Copy-deadline for the next issue of the South East Wales Unitarian News: **Saturday, 18 March 2017**

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