



## South East Wales Unitarian News

[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk) [www.ukunitarians.org.uk/sewus/](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/sewus/)



June 2012

### FOR YOUR DIARY

**Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> June – District Rally at Ross on Wye**, joint service with the Cotswold Group following a meal at the Royal Hotel.

**Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> October** – Visit by President of the General Assembly, Lis Dyson-Jones. Dinner at the Ivy Bush, Carmarthen. This is a joint-event with the South Wales District Association.

**Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December** – District Christmas Service at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Cefncoedycymer

### A FOND FAREWELL

**Gellionnen Chapel 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

This morning, in a service conducted by our lay-pastor Lewis Rees, we celebrated the life of Rev Eirion Phillips. Gellionnen and Graig were the last chapels that Eirion served and together we shared our memories with relatives, friends, fellow Unitarians and representatives from other organisations

After retiring, Eirion continued to take services and was always welcome at our own and many other chapels. Not only was he welcomed, but people very much looked forward to his visits.

We thank the Rev Eric Jones, Phillip Griffiths (President SE Wales Unitarians) and Colin Morgan, a lifetime friend of Eirion's, for their recollection. Eirion was a gifted man who could spread smiles and laughter wherever he went. He cared deeply about people and their situations as many of us know. Lewis Rees commented that Eirion's example has caused him to set out on a course of theological training.

Eirion's ashes were scattered on Gellionnen Mountain where they belong. The rhododendrons are in bloom and soon we shall see the heather come into flower.

*Marian Littlepage*

### SPONSORED HYMN SINGING

As was reported in the April issue of the newsletter the South East Wales Unitarian Society sponsored a hymn singing event at Capel y Graig, Trebanos on 11<sup>th</sup> March. All pledges have now been made good, raising a total of **£940** for the Ministerial Students' Fund of the General Assembly. When 'Gift Aid' has been added the Fund will benefit by over **£1100**. Congratulations and 'thank you' to all who took part.

### DISTRICT AGM 2012

The Annual General Meeting of the South East Wales Unitarian Society was held at Highland Place, Aberdare on Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2012 at 11am



Aberdare and Cardiff children pictured together at Highland Place

Photo: Keith Lewis-Jones

We were pleased to have the company of Rev John Clifford, our Link-person with the GA, Mr Dewi Owen, Development Officer at Cardiff, and Dr Carwyn Tywyn, Secretary of the Unitarian Welsh Department, accompanied by their wives.

The gathering began with a short service of worship conducted by President of the SEWUS, Phil Griffiths who gave a warm welcome to all present, especially to the children from Cardiff and Aberdare Sunday Schools who later impressed and entertained us with their contributions to the service. Accompaniment to the hymns was provided by talented young organist Jacob Jones of Highland Place Church.

At the close of the period of worship Dr Carwyn Tywyn gave a brief review of his first year in post and an outline of how he sees things progressing.

After a shared-lunch we reconvened for the business session at 1pm. The Annual Report, covering the work of the Society in all of its component parts, was presented, section by section, and accepted. Nomination and election of Officers for the ensuing year then took place. (The Annual Report and details of the Current Officers are available on the SEWUS website at [www.ukunitarians.org.uk/sewus/](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/sewus/))

The GA Executive Committee Report was presented by Rev John Clifford, followed by questions, comments and some discussion.

Our thanks to Highland Place congregation for their hospitality.

## **REPRESENTING SOUTH EAST WALES AT THE 2012 GA MEETINGS AT KEELE**

Rather than give a general overview of the proceedings of this year's meetings I have decided to focus my efforts on the content of The Keynote Speech entitled "The future for liberal religions – Quaker perspectives", given by Paul Baker who is the Recording Clerk for The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. Quaker membership, similarly to our own denomination, is in decline and Paul Baker had some 'insights' into how they, and possibly we, might rise to the challenges facing all liberal religions and I felt that this was something which it was worthwhile sharing with you. As best I can I have adapted the challenges to 'fit' the Unitarian community.

### **Challenge No 1** Do we understand what's going on with our membership?

Many Unitarians today have become Unitarians later in life and have not grown-up within that tradition. Often these are people upon whom we depend to run our congregations. Can we be sure that the services in our churches are relevant and accessible for those people who are new to Unitarianism? Have we ever asked our congregations if they are getting what they want from our services or what could be done to meet their needs?

### **Challenge No 2** Are we confident of who we are, and what we have to offer?

What would you say if someone said – I see you are a Unitarian, tell me why? If we can't answer that question, we're in trouble. At the very least, we have to know the answers for ourselves, and ideally, we need to be prepared to open our mouths and tell others. This is not proselytising, it's making sure that people know what we stand for. Maybe we should encourage our members, from time to time, as the Quakers do, to be prepared to talk about their understanding of all sorts of issues e.g. pleasure, pain, faith, loss, joy and peace which are all part and parcel of human existence.

### **Challenge No 3** Do we speak in a language that people can relate to?

How do we explain our religious practices and understanding to people who know they are searching for something, who may not, up until this point, actually have been to a church? How do we explain the chalice lighting, the different religious perspectives we often include in our services and the lack of a set liturgy? Moreover, how do we get across that our services are relevant and helpful in everyday life?

### **Challenge No 4** Do we actually live up to what we say we believe?

This is a hard one. Do the people who attend our services come away with fresh insights? Have they received some words of comfort or forgiveness? Have they been prompted to change? In joining our congregation for worship do they feel better in themselves? Do we, in our daily lives, demonstrate the value and meaning of being part of a Unitarian congregation or community?

### **Challenge No 5** Do we make sure people know we exist?

Do the signs outside our buildings give clear information about the times of services/meetings? Is there straight-forward and easy to understand information displayed explaining what Unitarianism is? Do we take every opportunity to publicise our activities?

**Challenge No 6** Do we make sure that people can find us and that they feel welcome the first time they come?

Do we have a website and is it kept up to date? Does the website include the postal address of our church? Are there people on the door to welcome visitors? Within the church are the other members friendly and accepting of visitors? Is there a time of fellowship at the end of the service when newcomers can meet with other members of the congregation?

**Challenge No 7** Are we vibrant communities?

What impression do we give to visitors or newcomers? Is our church building looked after and in good repair? Is it evident that there are a number of church activities other than Sunday services e.g. Women's group, Children's groups? Do the activities of the church find their way onto the pages of the local newspapers? Could we organise events which would promote our existence in the local community e.g. organise an open day and welcome the wider community into our church?

I would like to thank sincerely the South East Wales Unitarian Society for sponsoring my attendance at The General Assembly meetings.

*Ella Lewis-Jones*

## **GETTING TO KNOW YOU ...Informal interviews with local Unitarians**

The interview in this issue of South East Wales Unitarian News is with Stephen Wilson who is a member of the Swansea Congregation and their organist. Stephen has an unusual spiritual background being the son of the late Rev Duncan Wilson who was a Unitarian Minister and his mother Noemi who comes from a Jewish background and whose parents were forced to flee their home in Czechoslovakia during the Second World War. His grandfather Arthur Wilson was, for many years, the District Treasurer and both he and his wife Norah were very active members of the Cardiff congregation. Stephen is also the nephew of Shelia Cousins who, until she moved to West Wales, was the chairperson of the Cardiff congregation. Stephen is about to take his first service.

Stephen has a degree in Engineering Physics from Sheffield Hallam University. He is currently working in Data Quality in the Information Department of the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board. Outside of work, he plays the organ for two Swansea churches and is the deputy accompanist for a Welsh male voice choir (the Gwalia Singers, Swansea). He is also involved with Limelight Theatre (based in Dunvant) and acted as Musical Director for a concert last year. He assists "Just a Note", providing piano accompaniment at concerts and exams. On many occasions in recent years Stephen has acted as accompanist for a number of district events, including the National President Rev Dr Ann Peart's visit last October, which took place at Penrhiw Chapel, St Fagans, the District Christmas Service at Nottage and the Sponsored Hymn Singing at Trebanos in March.

*Ella Lewis-Jones*

### ***What is your first memory?***

Listening to an EP on our old Bush record player with my father (Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nacht Musik") and riding backwards in the kitchen while my mother sang "I'm walking backwards for Christmas."

### ***I understand that your parents were of different religious persuasions' (Unitarian and Jewish).***

#### ***What did you learn from this?***

It's probably given me more freedom – both my parents held liberal viewpoints, and I've been able to question religious beliefs rather than having any forced on me. Being Unitarian is something you can choose to be. Being Jewish is more complicated and involves factors such as culture and genealogy as well as religious belief. European Jews have often been forced to leave everything behind due to various forms of anti-Semitism. It's made me appreciate that there are many stereotypes about certain religions, that many people born into a particular religion are often poorly informed about their own religion, let alone others, and that although I believe people of different faiths and nationalities should feel comfortable mixing with each other, I can also understand why some choose to segregate themselves.

### ***What qualities do you most admire in other people?***

Kindness, and the ability to make others laugh.

### ***I believe that music is an important part of your life. Can you describe what your various musical interests mean to you?***

I played records from the age of about 3. I started piano lessons when I was 6. For a few years, I had a piano teacher who was very old fashioned and took much of the joy out of music. Fortunately I stuck at it, and found that making music can actually be enjoyable. Learning to play the piano began as a

challenge – tackling scales, theory and exams – and was quite a solitary activity. It now represents many things – it can still be challenging, but it's also a hobby as well as a social activity as I've been involved with orchestras, operatic societies, bands and choirs. I can't imagine a world without music. I've been to places and met people I wouldn't have otherwise. I've also been involved with youth groups and it's been particularly rewarding seeing the enthusiasm of some of the children and helping to give them an opportunity to perform.

***Can you remember a specific book which made an impression on you as a child?***

I read a lot of books when I was young. I remember enjoying books by Enid Blyton and later Roald Dahl. When I visited my grandmother, I'd borrow books from the library and reading "Dr Who and the Crusaders" started my fascination with Dr Who – and this has remained with me ever since!

***What would make the world a better place?***

Less nationalism (or the idea that your country/culture is superior to others) and more patriotism (being able to be proud of your country). An appreciation for nature - the world becomes a poorer place every time another species becomes extinct due to human selfishness and greed. On a smaller scale, for people to take more responsibility for themselves and the society they live in, to think and care more for others around them, to realise that wealth isn't just about the amount of money in their wallets and simply being able to offer compassion and a smile to someone else who may be having a bad day.

***What takes up most of your time?***

There's no getting away from work – 40 hours a week.

***What is the best piece of advice you have been given?***

There are 2 quotes I've always remembered. e.e. cummings said "The hardest challenge is to be yourself in a world where everyone is trying to make you into somebody else." Einstein said "Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning."

***What has been the most significant challenge in your life?***

Life's a series of challenges. I can't think of one that significantly stands out over all others.

***What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?***

I have a tendency to be indecisive.

***What music would you like to be played at your funeral?***

This isn't something I've given much thought to. I don't really mind what happens – I won't be there. Probably something daft like Monty Python's "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life".

## **SENIOR WEEKEND REPORT**

The 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> of March was time for another Unitarian Senior Weekend, and yet again I was finding it hard to contain my excitement. For Bethan and Ciera Branagh (Swansea) and for me, after an eventful journey to Great Hucklow we finally felt at home again.

The first night was the usual icebreakers/getting to know one another, then we went into separate groups to plan our 'circle times'. Circle time is a relaxation period before bed, just to quieten us down, I always really enjoy it.

On the Saturday morning we were all running on adrenalin and coffee! With only having 3 days to catch up and enjoy fabulous activities, the nights usually consist of the catching up! We had a very thoughtful session led by Andrew Rosser. We wrote letters to our bodies saying what we were sorry for doing to them (always painting my nails, always piercing my ears!) but also what we liked and what we were thankful to our bodies about. Being 16 and having the self esteem of a spoon, it was encouraging to know that everyone had the same body hang ups as me!

There was the annual walk to Eyam – which I heard was a success. However being a Welsh girl I passed on that to watch our boys winning the Six Nations! Yes, well done!

Definitely the best part of Saturday was a drumming session led by John Hartshorn. He brought many different cultural instruments, massive bass drums, maracas, snare drums, wood blocks... there were more, and they all had proper names, however I cannot remember them... We all got involved and played different instruments with different rhythms and it all sounded awesome! Incredibly good fun as well. The Inters also got involved in this session which I thought was a great idea. It's good to show them what Seniors is like and to meet us, then the jump isn't so scary.

Sunday was the last day, and the obvious question '*How did it go so fast?*' was asked multiple times. I don't really know *how*, all I do know is that it makes you appreciate what is happening a lot more.

We participated in the chapel service and then went to the trough for the annual 'Trough Ceremony' of leaving and new youth. We then had the last circle time and the evaluation of the weekend. Oh I remember the days when we said 'better food!', 'better beds!' How the Nightingale Centre has changed! We are now all typical teenagers – 'later breakfasts', and 'later bedtimes' are our main priorities.

It's always an issue trying to finish these reports. I feel like I have to explain how amazing Hucklow is...but I can't. Hucklow is an *experience*, an *amazing experience*, it becomes part of your genes and you wonder how you ever lived without it. So, I can't explain just how amazing it is—you just have to experience it.

*Elizabeth Rosenberg, Porthcawl*

## FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK – O DDESG YR YSGRIFENNYDD

### SEWUS inspires action in the west...

Members of SEWUS may be interested to know that, as a direct result of your Away-Day held in Glynneath last year, South Wales District have now started work on modernising the governance of their chapels. They held a special meeting in April (attended by myself and Derek McAuley, Chief Officer of the GA), and now plan to hold a series of workshops, where representatives from each chapel in the district will come together to work on their constitutions and other governance issues (land registry, child protection, trustees, etc., etc...). Understandably, matters of governance can be a "turn-off" for many people. However, I think the process that both Welsh districts have now started, gives each chapel a chance (perhaps for the first time in many years) to discuss openly about their mission, their current resources, and their future.

I think it's really encouraging that an idea that started within SEWUS has been taken up by South Wales District. And, as things move forward in the South Wales District, I look forward to reporting back to SEWUS on new initiatives that are happening "out west". For example, I think the way that South Wales District are organising joint workshops, where every chapel is represented, may be a model for SEWUS to consider, so that no single chapel feels left behind in what can seem a daunting or "boring" process of writing a constitution.

As an aside, I hope that the way in which I've personally been able to communicate back and forth between the two Districts on governance, and other matters, demonstrates the value of the role of Welsh Department Secretary.

### Less is more?

I recently had my formal job appraisal with Derek McAuley, my line manager and Chief Officer of the GA. I shared with him a concern that the limitations of my working week of 2.5 days made it difficult for me to work consistently across the wide range of tasks that I am expected to do.

During my first year, I held external meetings with a wide range of Unitarian officers in both Welsh districts, and Bangor, and attended several services. However, my current workload – and the short time in which I have to complete that work – means that I have to shift more towards office work for the next period.

Over the next two or three months, I shall be deliberately focusing on completing a few key tasks. Namely: 1) Co-ordinating our Eisteddfod tent, 2) Producing the Welsh Unitarian Directory (handbook), 3) Producing the first edition of a newsletter (Y Fflam / The Flame) for my growing list of individual, non-affiliated Unitarians in Wales. 4) Attending key meetings (Welsh Department, the two Welsh Districts, Pantyfedwen Trust and the Wales committee of Christian Aid).

As always, I remain contactable by phone or email. I am happy to arrange a meeting to discuss a specific issue at any time. I am also keen to be invited to Sunday services in the future, so that congregations can discuss my work as Welsh Department Secretary, and to ask questions of me directly. ***This would count as part of my working week for the GA, and therefore at no extra financial cost to congregations.*** I hope that you – as Cardiff already have – will respond favourably to this suggestion over the months ahead.

Gyda ddiolch am eich cefnogaeth – With thanks for your support

*Carwyn Tywyn, Welsh Department Secretary / Ysgrifennydd y Gyfadran.*

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# **KEY MESSAGES FROM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

## **1. Communications**

Improving communications at all levels of the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement was a significant agenda item following the Resolution at the Annual Meetings calling upon the Executive Committee (EC) to develop its policy. Several steps had been already taken at the last EC meeting and presented to the Annual Meeting by the Convenor.

Improving communications is an ongoing two-way process. The EC agreed a number of actions and will be giving further consideration of other measures it can take. These are not simple matters, particularly as expectations on congregations, districts and the General Assembly have grown and our structures may not be keeping pace. A range of views were expressed on opening the meetings to the public and/or the denominational press and after considerable debate it was agreed that there be no change to the current position. This is, however, very much the start of a journey and we look forward to engaging the wider Unitarian movement to identify what works.

The following additional communications actions were agreed:

- Arranging a face-to-face meeting between District representatives and the EC in the late autumn. Joan Cook, Rev John Clifford and Derek McAuley have been tasked to progress and ensure the event would prove valuable for both and value for money.
- Encouraging many more Unitarians to sign-up for the GA distribution system “uni-news” enabling direct and timely communication.
- Convenor and Chief Officer to hold an open conference call several times a year.
- Inserts from a “national” perspective written by EC members and the Chief Officer to be made available for use in congregational newsletters on a monthly basis.
- Ministerial Fellowship to be approached to seek ideas on how engagement with ministers can be developed further.

## **2. 2020 Congregational Development Programme**

Rev Andy Pakula reported that at the Annual Meeting there was excitement and positivity about the potential for new congregational starts of various forms as a result of 2020 congregational development programme. Several people had come forward and offered to help in various ways. It was agreed to appoint Christopher Sande and Rev Daniel Costley to the Programme Board, joining Rev Andy Pakula, Rev Martin Whitell and Yvonne Aburrow. The Inquirer and The Unitarian had agreed to publish regular updates on progress and a Facebook Group had been set up which had already generated much helpful discussion. The target date for receipt of the first applications was likely to be mid-2013 and there was much work to be done over the next year, particularly on fund-raising.

## **3. Becoming a welcoming Congregation**

Nationally the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement is now known as a pioneer of inclusion for LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people); most notably recently for equal marriage. Locally many congregations have been positive; reflecting the liberal religious spirit and the Unitarian commitment to freedom and social justice. However, congregations will be at different stages on the journey of welcome and all can still do more. A resource “Becoming a Welcoming Congregation” has been produced to help congregations think about the issues involved with suggestions for actions that can be taken locally. This will shortly be finalised and be disseminated and placed on the GA website. Yvonne Aburrow was thanked for her work on this resource.

## **4. Annual Meeting, Keele 2012**

The feedback received on the Annual Meetings has overall been very positive. The programme was generally well-received, issues of importance were seen as being raised at the business sessions and the various speakers were excellent; notably Rev Peter Owen-Jones (John Rely Beard lecture), keynote speaker Paul Parker from the Quakers and Rev Celia Cartright, the Anniversary Service Preacher. The Opening Celebrations were memorable with the personal contributions appreciated. The facilities were good and the Meeting was well-organised. The attendance and the budget look likely to be on target. Andrew Mason as Annual Meetings Organiser, the Annual Meetings action group and Essex Hall staff and all volunteers, particularly Louise and Zoe Rogers, were thanked for all their hard work. Plans for the next Annual Meeting in Nottingham, 10 – 13 April 2013 were outlined and work on arrangements has already begun. We know the facilities are good, having been there in 2010, the challenge is now to match the success of 2012!

A consultation pack for congregations, districts, affiliated societies and individuals, prepared by Fulwood Unitarians, will soon be issued on assisted dying following the referral back of the Motion at the Annual Meeting. Look out for publicity in the denominational press and please join in the consultation. This process of consultation may be a useful pattern for the future on controversial matters.

## **5. Chief Officer's Report**

The Chief Officer reported that he had made submissions to the Hodgson Review of the Charity Act 2006 on the specific issue of "excepted" charity status, to which any change would affect most Unitarian and Free Christian churches as members of the General Assembly, and to HMRC on the imposition of VAT on alterations to listed buildings. He had attended a workshop on new Government regulations on transferring money overseas and would be circulating information to congregations.

He had met with the Quakers and Liberal Judaism on tactics on the Government's equal marriage consultation and joined in a consultation meeting at the Home Office as part of the Inter-faith Network. He had participated in the "Cutting Edge Consortium" conference at Conway Hall on 21 April 2012, chairing the main plenary session with an audience of 150 as well as running a workshop.

## **6. Financial Position**

The GA's financial position at the end of April 2012 show a small surplus of £6,000 on running costs but with a forecast end of year deficit of £11,000 even after using £25,000 of "restricted" funds. Income is not meeting our budgeted expectations.

## **7. Honorary Treasurer**

EC member Robert Ince was appointed to act as interim Honorary Treasurer. The search goes on for someone to undertake the position and anyone who may be interested or may be aware of an individual with the required skills should contact the Chief Officer.

## **8. Re-appointment of Convenor**

Rev Martin Whitell was unanimously re-appointed to act as EC Convenor for a further year. He was thanked for his contribution to leading the EC during his first year as Convenor.

## **9. Worship**

The Local Leadership Strategic Group reported that, following a request from the EC, they have initiated work on worship packs, worship materials and worship workshops, taking note of the comments about the importance of supporting worship at the Annual Meeting.

## **10. Millennium Fund**

A grant of £250 was made to the National Unitarian Fellowship to assist with the purchase of autocue equipment which will improve the quality of audio visual presentations on the NUF website

## **11. Nightingale Centre**

The EC act as trustees of The Nightingale Centre and were pleased to support work currently being undertaken by the Centre's Management Committee with the Charity Commission to update the Order originally agreed in 1964 on formal name, objects and property matters. The Management Committee was thanked for this work to modernise and regularise the legal position.

## **THOUGHT FOR NOW**

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

Life is not easy for any of us. What does that matter? We must persevere with confidence in ourselves. We must believe that our gifts were given to us for some purpose, and we must attain to that purpose, whatever the price we have to pay for it.

*Words by Marie Curie*

## **ABERDARE**

During the past couple of months there have been a number of developments relating to the administration of the Church's business affairs.

In March there was a very helpful meeting between David Edwards Insurance Brokers and four representatives from the church, when the insurance cover for the church was discussed. Several queries relating to the current insurance policy had been brought to the attention of the Church Committee over the preceding months about whether the existing policy provided sufficient cover for a) any outings which were organised for the children's group, b) the new audio-visual and digital equipment belonging to the church, and c) Public Liability cover. As a result of the meeting it was established that the Children's outings organised by the church would be fully covered as well as the audio-visual equipment both within and without the church premises. The Public Liability cover was increased.

Highland Place generates a modest income from letting the Schoolroom to a number of community groups. Until very recently there were no formal arrangements for the letting of the room and the church was advised that they should develop some terms and conditions to cover the letting of church premises. A document containing the terms & conditions of hiring has been prepared by Keith Lewis-Jones.

At the church AGM in March a Draft Constitution was circulated for further discussion later in the year. Currently the church has a number of support groups, for example, Worship, Finance, Buildings and others, who work on behalf of the congregation and have no representation on the Church Management Committee. The draft Church Constitution has been amended to take account of the role of the support groups and to ensure that they are represented and that some co-ordination and support is provided. The draft constitution also contains proposals to improve the way in which church elections are organised.

*Ella Lewis-Jones*

### **Aberdare Women's League**

Our coffee morning from 10am to 12pm every Monday has proved very successful. Dilys Evans provides the tea and coffee and Tony Foster the excellent Welsh cakes. The members and regulars from the locality have got to know each other very well and there is a very good atmosphere. There is the opportunity to play scrabble or other games. However, most people choose to have a jolly good chat. A few people just pop in to buy a book. This enterprise is steadily adding to the funds of Women's League and the children's Uni'Club.

The Entertainments Group, formed to bring members of Church and Women's League together, gets off the starting blocks with a dinner and quiz at Aberdare Golf Club on 24<sup>th</sup> May.

In April ladies of Highland Place Women's League and Church set off in a little pink bus for a trip on the Mountain Railway at Pant, Merthyr Tydfil. In spite of inclement weather, spirits were high.

The journey in the steam train with its wooden seats was very enjoyable. Our view across to picturesque Trefechan and Pontsticill was delightful, thanks to a large extent to the irrepressible Joy Foster dashing up and down the compartment to clear all the misted windows.

This was a trip back in time to the days of "Brief Encounter". Sadly there were no Trevor Howards present that day. They were probably at the pictures with their Celia Johnsons !!!

After the journey lunch was enjoyed in the station restaurant. A very good day out.

*Dilys Evans*

### **Highland Place Uni'Club Sunday School**

Hello to everyone in the district, I hope you are enjoying this lovely weather.

Recently the children took part in the Spring Fayre here at Highland Place. They had their own stall, set up in the church, selling home made toffee apples, chocolates, rice krispie cakes, house plants that they had potted up earlier in the year, and face painting. They made an amazing total of £68.20! This money is going towards the hire of a mini bus for our first anniversary outing!

Yes, it's almost a year since Uni'Club started. And what a full year it has been.

The children's weekly attendance has been excellent. The parents are always willingly supportive of the events the children take part in.



Photo – Joy Foster

We had great news earlier in the year that we had been successful in our application for a grant towards capital expenditure which has enabled us to buy important equipment. The grant from Interlink was for £2875. Some of the items we have purchased so far are a laptop computer, projector, screen, printer, badge-making machine, and camera.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my co-leader Dilys Evans for her support and sharing this pioneering journey. Also my thanks to Anne Watts for her helping when she is able to. But most of all I thank the children for their commitment and for bringing their enthusiasm with them when they come. If anyone else is interested in sharing this journey with us and is willing to commit to at least two Sundays a month, please make yourself known to me. I would be delighted to answer any questions.

That's all for now folks, until the next time.

*Best wishes, Joy Foster*



## CARDIFF UNITARIANS / UNDOIDIAID CAERDYDD

We are very sorry for the death and loss of Ivy Thomas in April and have wished Pat, Steve and their families our condolences from church. Following some time in hospital at the end of 2011 Ivy moved back to her flat and then to Pat's home in Whitchurch before her death at the end of April. Since moving to Cardiff, Ivy has become a much loved and respected member of the congregation and Women's League in Cardiff. She was also dearly remembered in Aberdare as a member of Highland Place Women's League for many years. Her funeral service on Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> May was an excellent way of celebrating her life. Led by the Rev Eric Jones at Briwnant Chapel in Thornhill Crematorium, followed by a cup of tea and cake at Pat's home, it was well attended by Unitarians from several Unitarian chapels in the district. One amazing touch for me was hearing about Ivy going for a trip in a hot air balloon in Australia in her mature years and as I looked at the stained-glass window in the crematorium chapel – lo and behold, there was a hot air balloon in the glass. If I did believe in heaven, that would make a fine picture of Ivy ascending up to that very place in a celestial hot-air balloon.

Members from Cardiff attended the district AGM service and meeting at Highland Place, Aberdare on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May. We were delighted to meet members from other churches and for the first time the children from Aberdare Uni'Club. We were also very happy that children from our Sunday club in Cardiff were able to join us for the service and sing 'This Little Light of Mine' and talk about some of the things that they had made or taken part in at Children's Club. We have been very pleased to welcome Diana's grandchildren Logan, Hannah, Lily, Becca, Mari and Sofia, Helen Smith's children William and Lily, Franziska's daughter Hannah and Dewi Owen's sons Alwyn and Osian to our club.

Members from Cardiff were also glad to meet up with John and Barbara Clifford at the AGM. As link person from the Executive Committee the Rev John Clifford had to field some quite difficult comments and questions at the meeting. We were reminded at the meeting that we are very fortunate as a district to now have the service of a Welsh Secretary, Carwyn Tywyn who is able to promote the identity and profile of Unitarianism in Wales as well as supporting good governance for congregations/district associations in Wales and to provide an invaluable link to the General Assembly. The congregation in Cardiff would like to thank him for all his work.

It is all change following the AGM at Cardiff Unitarians on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May. Our new Secretary is Diana Bianchi and new Treasurer is Sarah Boyce. Immense thanks go to Betty Evans who has been Treasurer since 1999 and who has consistently done a most excellent job. It has been a particularly busy year for Betty at work and setting up financial arrangements for Dewi as our new Development Officer with salary and office equipment. Gwynn Pritchard as our Chair will also become district representative for Cardiff at the district Executive meetings.

Our Development Officer, Dewi has been doing an excellent job and along with members of the congregation has helped draw up an Action Plan and Mission Statement and has been acting on these targets. These include the preparation of leaflets, writing an article and networking with other organisations such as Aled Edwards from Cytun, Vaughan Rees from the Wales Interfaith Council and Sister Ruth who works with Asylum seekers and refugees in Cardiff. Sister Ruth will be coming to talk to the congregation as part of the Women's League service on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> June as to how we as a congregation can become involved with supporting individuals who are refugees or asylum seekers in Cardiff. Dewi will also be linking up with other congregations from our district and with Carwyn Tywyn, Welsh Secretary. As part of his induction he has also spent time with the Rev Eric Jones.

Cardiff Unitarians / Undodiaid Caerdydd were delighted to host a joint meeting on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> June at the Temple of Peace, Cathays Park with United Nations Association, Cardiff and District and other organisations on banning military schoolyard recruitment and to launch a petition to raise this issue with the Welsh Assembly. Unlike the rest of Europe the British army is able to recruit young people from the age of 15 and 7 months. Head teachers have allowed recruitment talks from the armed forces without seeking parental permission and without offering a balanced view from other organisations. There were excellent speakers from Cymru X, CND Cymru and Cymdeithas Y Cymod (Fellowship of Reconciliation) and over 90 people attended the meeting and there was a lively discussion and useful points made by the audience. We were very pleased to see the Rev Ceu Llwyd at the meeting who had travelled from South Wales district and is a member of Cymdeithas Y Cymod and Morgan Chambers from Merthyr. We heard that areas like Merthyr and Wales in general have a higher number of young people joining the armed forces because they believe there are fewer employment and training opportunities for them. We will follow this campaign and see what can be done further.

We look forward to joining with other congregations in the district for the Rally on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June.

*Sarah Boyce*

## **CEFNCOED**

In common with other SE Wales congregations we recently received a visit from insurance broker David Edwards giving advice on our cover. At the end of May two researchers with an interest in Matthew Wayne (Gadlys, Aberdare) visited Hen Dŷ Cwrdd to compare notes and view the family tomb. Several members attended the SEWUS AGM at Aberdare on 20<sup>th</sup> May.

*Ken Morgan*

### **Women's League**

After a quiet start back to activity in February we launched into March with more vigour. At one meeting we had to say who we would choose to invite as a dinner-guest. Marian Lewis came top of the class – her guest would have been Mr Terry Waite. She brought his book and read a passage or two from it which we found very interesting

At the League District Meeting held at Aberdare on 28<sup>th</sup> March Marian Lewis was elected District League President. As promised, all of us at Cefn Coed will be supporting her. Congratulations Marian.

Many League members, chauffeured by kind chapel gentlemen, attended the memorial service held at Gellionnen Chapel on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May to celebrate the life of the late Rev Eirion Phillips.

On Wednesday, 30<sup>th</sup> May a group of twelve teachers visited Hen Dŷ Cwrdd as part of their Welsh-Language studies organised by Gwent College and led by our own Elizabeth Bowen-Picket. They were given lunch and a conducted tour of our lovely chapel. Everyone enjoyed themselves and, true to form, we excelled with the food—what more can I say?

*Vera Tomsett*

## **NOTTAGE**

Services are continuing as usual but there is nothing further to report. *Alastair Rosenberg*

## **SWANSEA**

On 1<sup>st</sup> May, Mollie Jones our most senior member, celebrated her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. Although unable to attend services Mollie retains a deep interest in the church and she enjoyed all the cards and loving wishes sent to her by the congregation. Mollie is still able to enjoy visiting her favourite places in Gower when her son Jack visits and takes her in the car. We miss her.

We have been pleased to welcome Kirsteen to our Sunday Worship. Kirsteen was looking for a spiritual home and found us on the Internet. We hope she will be happy with us.

We are grateful to the people who lead us in worship. We were pleased to have Julie Nedin take her first service with us on the theme of Connections. Come again Julie. One of the most recent speakers, Mr Philip Griffiths, told us about his visit to the Holy Land. The theme of his service was zealots and bigots. What a lot of trouble people with extreme views cause in the world! It was a most interesting address with some quotations containing real pearls of wisdom. I wish he would publish them in the Newsletter.

It is delightful to sit in church on a warm evening and enjoy the delicate tracery of our ancient windows highlighted by the evening sun on the walls. Every season has its special charm and this is one of Summer's.

*Pamela Taylor*

## **TREBANOS**

### **GELLIONNEN**

As ever over the Easter period, Gellionnen's graveyard was filled with the colour of fresh flowers brought from far and wide by the relatives of past attenders at this lovely chapel.

Ken Morgan took a lovely service on Easter Sunday and presided over a dish of Easter eggs. Elizabeth and John Bevan attended with all four grandchildren.

Our new windows are looking good and the chapel is filled with light. We have recently had some new flooring put down in one corner where there had been a long standing damp problem. We have had a

mammoth spring clean and Sara Jones and her mother Jenny Crapley took on the huge task of cleaning the bramble alongside our gates. Because the ground was then left looking very bare they returned during the week and planted it up with forget-me-nots. And Jenny thought she was here on holiday!

On the following Sunday Lewis took his first service back with us—welcome back, we've missed you. And this was followed by the marriage ceremony of Jennifer Jones and Iain Barrett. To Jennifer and Iain we extend our very best wishes for their future happiness.

Aneurin Jones was recently awarded a place at the Bluegrass Sore Fingers Summer School Week. Congratulations Aneurin, we're told they worked you very hard but you thoroughly enjoyed it.

Our after service pub lunch in April was tasty and could well be the beginning of more. And, on the subject of lunches, Jane Carpenter deserves a big 'thank you' for organising the Gellionnen Community Picnic – she even arranged lovely weather. Jane doesn't do anything by halves. About forty people turned up, many of them with musical instruments. One family came from Brecon.

Gellionnen and Graig's April–June Newsletter was dedicated to Eirion Phillips with a delightful photograph on the front provided by Norma. The good things folk do often live after them to enrich the lives of others.

*Marian Littlepage*

## **THE PLACE OF UNITARIANISM IN MODERN WALES**

**Dewi Owen says its time for a radical shift in Welsh Nonconformist thinking**

It is striking how conservative Welsh Nonconformity has become in recent years. This is in sharp contrast with its radical dynamic beginnings in fighting against injustice and its contribution to educating an illiterate population through Sunday schools. In the past it was also supportive of the trade union movement and the radical political parties of Wales – Liberal, Labour and Plaid – in the genesis of their formation through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

However, today's reality is that the pews are emptying while the shops are filling. Traditional religion does not now have the manpower to muster large-scale support for social justice campaigns. The new Atheists dream of a secular Utopia where all of us will have rational scientific minds like Captain Spock. Yet that has not materialised and never will.

At present we have a society plagued by dissatisfaction, alienation and stress, coupled with a lack of imagination and intelligence from our political leaders. Every day an increasingly privileged elite becomes wealthier, with the wholehearted support of a political class that worships the rich like Gods. The changing of Sunday trading laws to suit the Olympics was an illustration of how far we have come as a society of consumers. We work, eat, consume, and we die.

Is this what we really want as a society? Or is there an alternative that is more fulfilling? Religion does not claim to answer everything, but its function is to teach us what it is to be a fulfilled civilised human being. It teaches us to support the downtrodden, to give to those who need, to display compassion, and be civil. True, it is not a necessary condition to be religious to comply with these values. However, it is a near impossible task to have these values permeating a whole society without religious community, fellowship and support.

Does religion have a place in modern Wales? Or have we placed it on the shelf of our history? Should we just accept that we are now a post religious society with new icons to worship in our out of town retail parks on Sunday, and celebrity personalities gaining more attention than theology?

Unitarianism is the only religion in modern Wales that is taking the lead on these questions. However, it is ostracised by the main denominations because of its theology. It holds a liberal view that all individuals are welcome. It celebrates that each individual has his or her own mind and journey of spiritual and intellectual enquiry, but understands that we need to share a common fellowship and adhere to a sustainable community in pursuing social justice.

Religion has a place because it challenges the avarice that is a plague of modern times. It teaches acceptance of ourselves as we are and to be tolerant of others. It provides a map that we can follow on life's journey towards fulfilment. It holds to the doctrine that all human beings are of immense value.

It believes that religion is part of our very DNA. It has created supportive communities and created a legacy in music and literature that has enriched our nation.

However, if Nonconformity is to survive it needs to let go of the dogma that there is only one way to such religious values. People can think for themselves and will not blindly accept a doctrine. The way forward is to celebrate diversity and embrace all human beings for who they are. We will then have a civilised society where equality can really have a chance, and where our communities will support social justice.

*Dewi Owen, Development Officer with the Cardiff Unitarians / Undodiaid Caerdydd. May 20<sup>th</sup> 2012*

## **UNITARIAN MEDITATIONAL FELLOWSHIP, 11-13 MAY**

Until recent years the UMF was run by the late Rev David Monk of our Hindley Chapel. When David took ill he handed the reins over to Richard Bober. David had strong Buddhist links and Richard was for some years a practicing Unitarian but he eventually moved over into Buddhism. The May UMF weekend was held at Ivy Lodge, a retreat house in Warminster and once again Richard ran a wonderful series of meditations, beginning both mornings at 6.30am! Gentle exercise was conducted by Barbara Smith of our Trowbridge congregation.

The rail journey to Warminster from Swansea is very pleasant. I walked into Ivy House on the Friday afternoon with my suitcase on wheels and floated out after afternoon tea on the Sunday. The next UMF weekend will be held 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> November 2012, once again at Ivy Lodge.

*Marian Littlepage*

## **MINISTRY INQUIRY DAYS**

Want to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian minister or lay pastor/leader and about working with our congregations?

This summer the Ministry Commission is again holding Inquiry Days for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training.

**London**, Essex Church, Kensington: Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June

**Manchester**, Luther King House: Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> August

Times for both venues: 11am for 11.30 start – 3.30pm finish

**Booking deadlines:** 6<sup>th</sup> June for London and 3<sup>rd</sup> August for Manchester.

**Advance booking is essential.**

To book, please contact Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly,

Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384 / Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

## **UNITARIAN WEEKEND GATHERING BY THE SEA**

**Chat, 'energy Boosters', Singing, Meditation, Painting, Dozing By The Sea**

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> Sept - Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> Sept, or come for the Saturday only

**The Old School Room, Nottage, Porthcawl CF36 3SY**

Saturday

£5 session.

Guest Speaker—Douglas McGlashan

Qi Gong & Energy Instructor

Contact [kathybeckett@kathybeckett.plus.com](mailto:kathybeckett@kathybeckett.plus.com) tel: 02380273420

Marie Rosenberg Tel: 01656 772088

B&B accommodation available at [www.Blueseas.bnb.co.uk](http://www.Blueseas.bnb.co.uk) from £27 pp pn

Quote Marie Rosenberg when booking to claim your discount.

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## **ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION**

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