

Local History and Archaeology group 2018 outings.

May

Bryn Celli Ddu



We were again blessed with wonderful weather for our day in Anglesey! Lin and Dave had arranged for Joanna from the Thomas Telford Centre, Menai Bridge to guide us on a circular walk taking in Church Island and the Menai Bridge. We started our walk down to the island through a lovely wooded area which in earlier times had been an open gathering place for



drovers waiting to make the difficult crossing to the mainland with their cattle. The path led directly over a small causeway to Church Island, the Welsh name for which being Ynys Tysilio and it is widely believed that St Tysilio established a church there in the late sixth century although the present church dates back to the 1400's. We climbed a small hill to the War Memorial to local men of the two World Wars and were rewarded with beautiful views of the Straits and the two wonderful bridges spanning the dangerous waters. Robert Stephenson's Britannia Bridge to the West and nearby Thomas Telford's Menai Suspension Bridge. We continued our walk around the Belgian Promenade to stand and marvel at the civil engineering of the Suspension Bridge completed on 30 January 1826. It was the biggest suspension bridge at the time and its height, 100 ft. of clear space allowed the tall sailing ships negotiating the seaway to pass underneath. After exploring the Bridge further we had our picnic lunches then went to the small museum to look at the exhibits and watch an informative video about Telford's amazing ground breaking civil engineering skills in his construction of the Menai Bridge.



It was lovely to meet up again with Fiona for the archaeology part of our trip, a visit to Bryn Celli Ddu. After parking our cars near the site we had a pleasant stroll between fields and at last as we rounded a corner we were met with the impressive sight of Bryn Celli Ddu, the Mound in the Dark Grove. Fiona explained that it had started as a 'henge' enclosure in the later Neolithic about 5000 years ago and consisted of a bank (now lost) around an inner ditch. Towards the end of the Neolithic the henge was replaced by a passage tomb. It was excavated in 1928, human bones both burnt and unburnt were found within and a decorated pattern stone, which now is in the National Museum of Wales but a replica has been placed at the South West opening. Sometime at the end of its use the tomb was 'closed' by means of a large stone placed across the entrance. Bryn Celli Ddu is the only tomb on Anglesey to be aligned to coincide with the rising sun on the longest day of the year.

It is a major Scheduled Monument and in the care of CADW but official statistics apart it is an atmospheric place to visit.



Huge thanks to Lin and Dave and Fiona for a very interesting day out.
Suzanne.



June

Nercwys Tower



We were fortunate to have yet another sunny day for our visit arranged by Don and Sheila to Tower in Nercwys. It is a Grade 1 listed Welsh Fortified border house and is the only one still standing in Wales.



We were met by John Wynne-Eyton the owner whose family have lived in the house for six centuries and the local historian David Lowe who was to guide us round the house. The house was first mentioned in a 1465 account of the murder of Robert Byrne who was hanged by the then owner, Rheinallt Gruffydd ap Bleddyn, although it is thought that there was an earlier open hall house on the N.E. side. Over the centuries it has undergone alterations by different generations of the family. We were guided through the rooms filled with portraits, lovely furniture, militaria and ancient maps all connected with the family. David Lowe recounted anecdotes and a great deal of fascinating facts all too numerous for me to remember, however, as there were seventeen of us present I am sure those who wanted a question answered were happy with a response from David! The tour over we enjoyed splendid homemade cakes, scones, tea and coffee outside in the garden pagoda.



For the second half of our visit we made our way to Nercwys village green where we settled down for a picnic before visiting the church. St Mary's is a Grade 2* listed building and dates back to the 12th century. The church warden had kindly agreed to open the church and show us around. Inside at the west end is the oldest remaining part of the church with its Norman



arch and fragments of early stone work from around 1250 on the window ledge. Further ancient pieces of carved stone are to be found around the church and in the porch. To the right of the altar stands the remarkable piece of the old rood screen made into a chair and the remains have been recoloured to replicate its original colours. We spent some time exploring both the inside and picturesque outside of the church before going our separate ways home.

Many thanks to Sheila and Don for a lovely and interesting visit to Nercwys.

Suzanne.

July

Rhydymwyn Secrets

Local History/ Archaeology 2nd July 2018

The weather for our visit was 'scorchio' so it was a relief to retreat inside the Museum where Francesca had arranged for us to start our tour of the WWII secret site with a talk and the showing of a film made in 1942 which explained the production and storage of mustard gas at the site. The film was primarily to be used to educate the workers in the procedures required to be followed to prevent accidents and the strict codes to be followed for their protection whilst working with such dangerous materials.



Very brief history: 1940-1959 manufacture assembly and storage of chemical weapons.

During 1047-1959 tunnel complex stored most of the county's stock of mustard gas.

1941-45 nuclear test equipment at the site. During the Cold War period the site was used to stockpile food and raw materials.

Now the site has been designated as a Nature Reserve with a Visitor Centre on the site of the old gatehouse. The tunnels bored into the limestone ridge for storage were opened to the public in 2017 for managed access.

After the talk we were served delicious scones with cream, tea and coffee, followed by our picnics. Thus fortified we embarked on a tour of the extensive site accompanied by two excellent guides. The remaining storage buildings are vast and we were impressed by the 'rubberised' asphalt still in a good state, put down on the roads in the Danger Area to guard against any sparks created by vehicles. The river Alyn was diverted and canalised for flood protection and now provides a stable water supply for a managed wetland for the flourishing Nature Reserve in which the flora and fauna now flourish.



The site is very well worth a visit and I have barely touched on all there is to see.

Very many thanks to Francesca from us all.

Suzanne.

September

Brynkinalt Hall



Our group enjoyed a very interesting visit to Brynkinalt Hall today. After morning coffee and biscuits we were ably and entertainingly guided round her family home by Lady Kate Hill Trevor.

The Hall, which is a Grade II* listed building, was completed by Sir Edward Trevor in 1612, it was three storeys high and constructed of bricks made on the site with quoins of Cefn Stone. Extensive remodelling took place in 1808 by Charlotte Viscountess Dungannon whose taste can be seen throughout the house and she also embellished

the surrounding gardens and park. We were shown an historically unique book recording drawings, plans and sketches which led to her final designs for the house and furnishings. The house is full of paintings, art work, beautiful furniture and books built up by generations of the family. Far too much for me to summarise, however, I am sure that a large proportion of our group were present and for those unable to come today I can recommend a visit.



Many thanks are due to Marie for making the contacts and organising such an enjoyable visit. Thank you Marie.

Suzanne

October

Oriel Ynys Môn

Our trip to Anglesey was very enjoyable indeed. After meeting up in Amlwch we moved on to our first site visit, Parys Mountain, where the spectacular colours of the rocks were breathtaking. Fiona took us to the panoramic viewing point, overlooking the Great Opencastr Mine, which has been shaped and cut out over countless generations by miners using picks, shovels and latterly gunpowder.

Fiona explained that Parys Mountain was being mined before 1700 BC, evidence has been found for Bronze Age, Roman and Elizabethan exploitation, however, the boom in production came about in the 1770 to 1790's when Parys Mountain became the world's biggest producer of copper ore. We walked around the perimeter of the vast mine where the water was stained brown with iron and other mineral deposits, viewed remnants of old industrial workings and saw the old windmill on the skyline which had once been used to pump water up from the workings below.



We were all quite glad to get back into our cars, as the wind was decidedly wet and chilly, to move on to Oriel Ynys Mon, Llangefni which is a museum and arts centre plus a cafe! After our lunch we looked around the museum and found many artefacts relating to the mine as well as finds from Anglesey's long eventful history, too numerous to mention here.



For the third and last part of our day's visit we went up to see the Romano British Hut Circles at South Stack on Holy Island. Fiona guided us round explaining that the huts were used over a long period of time, evidence has been found of occupation in the Iron Age, about 500 BC and finds nearby of flint implements suggest that people were living in the area as long ago as the Mesolithic era. Some of the huts were still occupied in the 3rd Century and may well have been used for agricultural purposes in the 6th Century.

We wandered round exploring and admiring the views from the hill top location across the sea to the Llyn Peninsula. We marvelled at the construction of the hut circles, entrances situated away from the prevailing winds, hearths, some with stone platforms, others with walled enclosures and thought about the lives of the people who had lived there. Then it was time to take our leave and thank Fiona for her expertise in guiding us around after a very full day of local history and archaeology!

Suzanne.

November

Rhuddlan

After meeting in Rhuddlan Parish Church car park Brenda introduced us to Haydon who was to guide us round points of historical interest in Rhuddlan. We started by looking at the grassy bank and hollows, surrounded by modern houses, which showed where the Town Ditch had once encircled the early town as a defence against marauders. Later during our walk we were able to see the deepest remaining part of this bank and ditch construction lying East of Twthill Mound. In the town we stopped briefly to look at the gable end of the building known as Parliament House which according to legend is where Edward I passed the Statute of Rhuddlan, however, there is no foundation for this story although the wall contains a blocked 13th Century doorway and a 14th Century cusped ogee both probably from the castle. Another building that caught our attention was the rather imposing Banquet House, dated 1672 which has stone mullions and a Tudor arched lintel.



After a tramp through some wet and muddy fields, visiting the deep Town Ditch en route we stopped to look at Abbey Farm. It is set within the area of the Norman town and is on the site of a Dominican Friary founded around 1258. The farmyard occupies the site of what was once the cloister garth, there are blocked straight headed windows and two pointed windows in the farm buildings, plus some fragments of sepulchral slabs and a mutilated effigy set in a niche facing the yard. There is also a piece of attractive tracery in the farm garden wall. After we had explored this area we moved on passing the early Twthill Mound the site of the first Norman castle, some hardy souls climbed to the top for the view of the Clwyd Valley the rest of us started walking back to St Mary's Church where lunch was waiting!

We were all quite hungry by this time which was just as well as the church ladies provided us with soup, rolls, sandwiches, apple pie and custard, cake, coffee and tea!

Many thanks to Brenda for arranging our visit and to Rhuddlan Historical Society.

Suzanne.

December

Crogen Hall



Yesterday, for our last visit of 2018 we had a very enjoyable time at Crogen Hall. Sarah Robertson gave us a warm welcome and after tea and coffee took us on a tour of her house. It is now a very comfortable family home full of portraits, paintings, historical silver and interesting documents relating to local history and the family.

Alongside the house is a castle motte thought to have been occupied by Elise ap Madog in the early 1200's and Sarah told us it is also thought to be the site where Gwilym Brewis was hanged in 1230 as punishment for his affair with Siwan, wife of Llywelyn the Great. Apparently about 800 people gathered to watch! Hundreds of years later the motte was converted into an ice house and we were able to see the tunnel leading directly to it from the house. Sarah explained that the earliest part of the house is at the front, being late medieval, however, it was restored and partly rebuilt by the Earl of Dudley in 1831 which explains that date on the downspouts on the front elevation.



We did see one piece of early masonry in a bedroom on the uppermost floor, a lovely remnant of an ecclesiastical window which had been incorporated into the building possibly after the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The house has now remained in the possession of the Robertson family for well over a hundred years since Henry Robertson, the civil engineer, industrialist and politician acquired it after building his own mansion of



Pale Hall.

The family now run the estate as a successful business.



After our tour we had sandwiches, cake, scones and further tea and coffee and chatted over what we had seen during the morning. Helen thanked Sarah for her hospitality and I in turn thanked Helen for organising such a very pleasant visit. Thank you again Helen!

Suzanne.