

## Harwarden 4/3/2019

Well, after some dire weather warnings we had our usual good luck with with spells of sunshine and only a little rain. We started with a tour of the ancient church of St Deiniol, our guide was the wonderfully entertaining, insightful and erudite Richard Williams. An hour passed all too quickly.



We then walked over to Gladstone's Library, unique in the country, for a brief description and glimpse (in silence) as it is used for study by many people and is a truly wonderful institution to have nearby. Those of you who were not able to come will find masses of information on the internet.



After a lovely lunch in the Library restaurant, we visited Broughton Aerodrome, home of BAE where at the Chocks Away Diner we were able to view the runway and see displays of some de Havilland and BAE aircraft . A big 'thank you' to Francesca for arranging the day's visits.

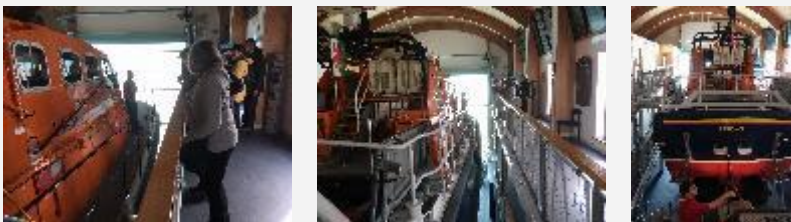
**Suzanne**

## RNLI Anglesey 1/4/2019

A doubtful weather forecast and April Fool's Day for our visit to Moelfre Anglesey! However, Lin and Dave had it all in hand, weather, jokes and a fascinating visit to the impressive RNLI Lifeboat Station and later to The Oriel Ynys Mon Llangefni with an optional coastal walk for those more active folk. Huge thanks to Lin and Dave for a very enjoyable visit.



We were welcomed at the RNLI Shop by Steve Owen, the visitor contact officer, a local man who has worked at the station for forty years and gave us an illustrated talk about the vital life saving work carried out by local volunteer crewmen over the years. He also had many anecdotes about various characters. The original boathouse was built in 1875 and replaced in 1909. It now houses 2 life boats, the All Weather Tamar Class called Kiwi in appreciation of the major sponsor from New Zealand, Reginald James Clark who was rescued by a lifeboat in WW11 after his ship was torpedoed. On our way to look at the lifeboat station we passed the Memorial Statue unveiled by Prince Charles in 2004 in memory of Richard (Dic) Evans 1905–2001 who served as a crewman at the station for 50 years and was credited with saving 281 lives.



We were able to eat our picnic lunches by the sea before going on to Oriel Ynys Mon where we were free to wander round and visit the art exhibitions and the local history and archaeological finds. As we all had different interests this part of our visit was individually explored and well worth further exploration as the exhibitions change during the year.



There is much information to be found for both places on the internet for any of you who were not able to attend and my report is just a flavour of a very interesting day.

Once again, thanks to Lin and Dave.

**Suzanne.**

## Montgomery 13/5/2019

Our joint visit, Local History and Strollers Groups, to Montgomery on Monday 13th May was a great success, thanks to Sue and Dave who had organised our visit in detail and arranged for our tour to



start at The Old Bell Museum.

There we were introduced to the curators, Drs. Ann and John Welton, who explained that the museum is run by volunteers, was converted to a local history museum by Montgomery Civic Society in 1981 and is a winner of a Prince of Wales Award. The Old Bell was formerly a 16th century inn and after several incarnations over the centuries now houses in its eleven little rooms extensive collections relating to the long social and civic history of the local area. There are permanent exhibitions devoted to the medieval and Norman Castles, the Forden Workhouse and the Cambrian Railway while the domestic side of the building can be seen in the kitchen bread oven, pantry and the dairy/ brewery, leather work and tanning yard. There was so much to see and ponder over that it will be well worth while to return time and again.

Our group split into two whilst 1 went with John Welton for a tour around town and 2 explored the Museum with Ann Welton after which we changed around. To quote from Montgomery Life through the Ages " A walk around the town is an education in itself, award winning history plaques, mounted on significant buildings, reveal the amazing diversity of trades and professions that Montgomery once supported."



We left the museum turning right and passing wisteria clad Georgian houses, past the imposing Town Hall and looking up the hill towards the castle we viewed in the foreground the black and white Dragon Hotel, originally built as a coaching Inn around 1630 and in the mid distance up the hill the former prison/ workhouse. We continued along the wide attractive Broad Street and up towards Church bank built along the original town walls where many of the houses incorporated stone work from the castle from when it was destroyed during the civil war and which had been aggrandised by the prosperous 18th century owners. Some boasting Flemish style roofs and elaborate chimney stacks. In the church yard we stood by the Robber's Grave to hear the story an innocent man's execution in 1821 and how just before he died he said his innocence. would be proved as nothing would ever grow on his grave. Apparently the Victorians flocked to visit his grave as did we!



When our groups rejoined we made our way up to the castle to eat our picnic lunches while admiring the spectacular views afforded by the castle's dominant position overlooking the surrounding countryside. The castle was begun by Henry 3rd in 1223 and given to Hubert de Burgh in 1228, it was held by the powerful Mortimers in the 14th century and later demolished by order of Parliament after the civil war. There are a few information boards around the site but for interest it is hugely worth visiting again.

Once again many thanks to Sue and Dave for a lovely day!

**Suzanne.**



## Conwy visit 3/6/2019

I am very happy to report that our Group's luck with good weather held and the marvellous views from the walls and harbour were enhanced by blue skies and sunshine.



We met up with Fiona in the car park where she gave us a brief overview of the history of Conwy and the places we were to visit. We walked to the railway station and Fiona guided us to a small gap alongside a house which brought us via a narrow pathway to an outside portion of the Town Walls in which there were deep recessed windows, these being the only portion surviving of the Welsh Princes of Gwynedd's Hall before it was demolished by order of Edward 1st in order to construct the walls to provide an integrated defence system alongside



Conwy Castle. Edward also moved the Cistercian Monks from Aberconwy Abbey and made the Abbey the Parish Church. We then walked, (scrambled in a few cases myself included!) to the highest part of the Town walls and were able to see the medieval layout and street pattern of Conwy. The Walls are over 3/4 of a mile in length, have 21 D shaped towers and 3 gateways. They were built under the supervision of Master James of St George, Edward 1's chief architect in North Wales. Between 1284-85 the Western side of the walls were constructed, this being the side most vulnerable to attack, and by 1287 they were completed. We made our way down to the Quayside and then along Castle Street to walk over Telford's beautiful Suspension Bridge, with a 500 year skip in our history! We marvelled at its construction, it was one of the first road suspension bridges in the world, 1822-26 and it still has its original iron chains which were made at Acrefair/Cefn Mawr.

We ate our picnics back at the Quayside in the sunshine, admired the lovely views and in some cases fended off a marauding seagull before making our way to the



magnificent Plas Mawr. It has been described as the ' finest Elizabethan townhouse in Britain' and was built by Robert Wynn. He bought the land in the heart of prosperous Conwy in 1570 and the earliest

plasterwork bears the date 1577. His initials appear many times in the ornamental plasterwork along with heraldic symbols to impress his visitors with his descent from princely stock and his wealth and status. The plasterwork apart from indicating status was a good way to introduce colour into the rooms and CADW has restored the colour to some of the plasterwork using the inventory of 1665 . We split up to wander round the rooms and follow our own particular interests be it in the some of the original furniture, the kitchen with its batterie de cuisine, the brewhouse, or the remarkable Wynn Cupboard made locally for John Wyn ap Maredudd around 1545. It stood in the Wyn family home, Gwydir Castle until 1921 when it was sold to the American newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst, it was later sold to Sir William Burrell and is now in the Burrell Collection in Glasgow but the Wynn Cupboard on display is an excellent replica.



Outside in the Upper Courtyard and just beyond there is a beautiful herb garden recreated using what is believed to be the original Elizabethan structure. There was so much to see and admire. I can't do it justice but for those who have not visited it is very well worth going and for those who have repeat visits are always worthwhile.

We ended our trip with a brief look inside the Parish Church of St Mary and All Angels, foundations of which go back to 1172. Inside we saw the hooded tomb of Robert Wynn builder of Plas Mawr, by the East window and two windows by the Pre Raphaelite, Edward Burne Jones. More to see but short of time!

We thanked Fiona for her excellent tutelage as ever and we look forward to future visits with her.

**Suzanne.**

# Castell y Bere 1/7/2019

For our visit this month, we ventured into Gwynedd, peaceful now but a place of much conflict and turmoil when the neighbouring destinations of our journey came into being. Below is a synopsis of a most pleasant and pleasing excursion.

## Castell y Bere



Standing on a rocky outcrop and now largely hidden by trees, these substantial ruins are what remain of a native Welsh castle, probably begun by Prince Llywelyn ap Iorwerth aka Llywelyn Fawr (Llywelyn the Great) in the early 1220's. With its wide outlook over the Dysynni Valley, it would have been a suitable base from which to provide security for his highly valuable cattle which would have grazed extensively in this area. The castle's defences were very substantial by comparison with other native Welsh constructions of that era despite which it had a surprisingly short active existence.

After the death of Llywelyn Fawr in 1240, the castle was used by his successors – Dafydd ap Llywelyn from 1240 to 1246, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd ap Llywelyn in 1246 and, finally, Dafydd ap Gruffydd from 1282 to 1283. In April 1283, towards the finale of the Second Welsh War of Independence, Castell y Bere was taken by a force from Montgomery, acting on behalf of Edward 1st (Edward Longshanks). For a time, it is believed to have been used as a support unit for English military units in the region.

There was a rebellion in 1294 led by Madog ap Llywelyn and an attempt to re-take the castle. The outcome of that rebellion is unknown but it is known that the castle was rendered indefensible and abandoned, most probably due to the difficulty of maintaining supply lines to such a remote location. Castell-y-Bere remains in a setting as wild and beautiful as it would have been when Llywelyn Fawr first set his eyes on it. It was our good fortune to be able to share his view!

## St Michaels Church, Llanfihangel-y-pennant



Standing almost in the shadow of Castell-y-Bere, the Church of St Michael in the hamlet of Llanfihangel-y-pennant is our second point of interest today. It is believed that there has been a church on this site since the 13th century and that the original church may have been built at roughly the same time as Castell-y-Bere. There is much to see in the church. The 12th century font, a scalloped bowl mounted on a cylindrical column is thought to come from the castle chapel. An angled window near the vestry is said

to have enabled lepers from a nearby colony, location unknown, to watch the services taking place without entering the building. On display, is also a model of the Dysynni Valley crafted in fabric by local people.



The church also houses a display commemorating Llanfihangel's most famous "Citizen" – Mary Jones. The hamlet, population 339 at the 2011 census, lies in the foothills of Cadair Idris, the highest summit of which is Penygadair which rises to 893 metres (2929ft). The easiest of three paths to that summit starts nearby. Daunting though that climb may seem, it is somewhat insignificant compared to the journey undertaken by Mary Jones, the 16 year old daughter of a local weaver, who set off one morning in 1800 to walk, barefoot, a distance of 26 miles through valleys and over hills to Bala, there to buy a Welsh Language Bible from the Reverend Thomas Charles with money which she had saved over a period of six years. There are conflicting tales of the events following her arrival in Bala but it is widely accepted that she did acquire her bible and that her determination inspired Reverend Charles to propose the founding of The British and Foreign Bible Society (now The Bible Society) in 1804. Mary's parents are buried in the churchyard at St Michael's. Mary died on 29th December 1864, her bible at her bedside, and she is buried nearby in the churchyard of Bethlehem Chapel Bryn-Crug on the road to Towyn. At Tyn-y-ddol, a short distance beyond the church, there is a memorial in the derelict remains of the Jones house.

**Don**



## Plas Teg 2/9/2019

What an unusual and thought provoking visit to the architectural gem Plas Teg and its extraordinary owner Cornelia Bayley. Many thanks to Rhiannon whose idea it was and for making the contacts with Cornelia.

Built in 1610 for Sir John Trevor Plas Teg has a 3 storeyed central block with a tower at each corner. These towers have ogee roofs and square cupolas and look very imposing from outside. The scheme of the house is 'so sophisticated it must have emanated from the Court circles in which Trevor moved and it is probable that a plan was provided by some official in the Royal works' (CLWYD by Edward Hubbard). Sir John Trevor died in 1629 and the house was passed down to Trevor descendants until the early twentieth century. During WW2 it was requisitioned by the War Office to billet soldiers and in 1945 sold to an auctioneering firm to be used for storage. In the 1950's it was in a seriously dilapidated state and there was talk of demolition, however, after a public outcry it received GRADE 1 status from CADW giving it protection. A Trevor descendant, Patrick Trevor Roper purchased it, partially restored it and then leased it out until 1977 when it was bought by Mr and Mrs W. Llewelyn and as they only occupied a small part of the house the rest became ruinous. But very fortunately for Plas Teg Cornelia Bayley bought it in 1986 and due to her devotion and passion has single handedly rescued this amazing house.

As we waited to be let into the house we little realised what the grey flinty exterior concealed within, for when we entered the main hall there were gasps of surprise at the colourful interior. Huge paintings adorn the walls, which were commissioned by Cornelia, the light from the windows at either end of the room illuminated the paintings, collections and antique furniture. Cornelia then gave us a guided tour of the house starting our ascent up the wonderfully carved Jacobean well type staircase to the numerous bedrooms, sitting rooms, library, dining room, kitchens, cellar and seemingly endless corridors and further stairways! She has single handedly decorated, repaired structure and furniture, made beautiful curtains, bed hangings and all manner of jobs to preserve Plas Teg. The rooms house her wonderful and eclectic collections and mirror her passion and enthusiasm. Too much for me to write about!





The second half of our day was spent visiting the ancient church of St Cyngar (St Cynfarch's) in nearby Hope. It was first mentioned in 1254, though occupying an ancient site, it is a double nave type with an interesting four stage battlemented tower. It has undergone several restorations over the years. Inside there are vestiges of wall paintings, some lovely stained glass and monumental effigies of Sir John Trevor and his wife Margaret, with coloured badges depicting the Trevor lineage. There is also an interesting remnant of a Celtic cross dated between the 9th and 11th centuries, now reset in the wall of the Lady Chapel. After a wander around the churchyard we made our way homeward with much to mull over and again thanks to Rhiannon.

**Suzanne.**

## Dee Valley History 4/11/2019

Another very successful meeting today! Thank you Helen for inviting Fiona Gale and organising the venue for her talk. The Scout Hostel Cynwyd was lovely and warm so we settled in to enjoy Fiona's presentation on The History of the Dee Valley.

Starting with the oldest site of human occupation in Wales, the Pont Newydd Cave, a palaeolithic archaeological site near St Asaph where fossilised remains of Neanderthals were found by a team from Bangor University in 1978 along with stone tools and animal bones. The cave was known about in the Victorian era and had been visited by Darwin when he was in the area. Two more adjoining caves near Tremeirchion, Ffynnon Beuno and Cae Gwyn have found to be occupied by both Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens.

Fiona next showed us pictures of the Neolithic Maesmôr Mace Head found in 1840. The intricate carving from such an early time is truly astonishing. We then moved through the early Bronze Age: the stone circle, Moel Ty Uchaf on the slopes of the Berwyn range above Cynwyd, the cup and ring marked stone on the Eglwyseg range, the wonderful Mold Gold Cape, discovered in 1833, made of sheet gold and embellished with intricate designs thought to have ceremonial purposes. We then saw aerial photos of the Clwydian 'hillforts' of Moel Fenlli, Pencloddiau and nearer still Caer Drewyn above Corwen with its large stone ramparts and commanding views of the surrounding area. Next the aerial views of Moel y Gaer Llantysilio which has suffered damage due to off roading motor bikes cutting right through the centre and is thus a very vulnerable site.

There is evidence for Roman activity around Corwen with the Pen Plenau marching camp on the Berwyn and artefacts such as the roof tile antefix bearing the symbol XXth Legion.

Coming closer in history Fiona talked about Eliseg's Pillar near Valle Crucis Abbey where in the 9th century Cyngen had it erected to celebrate his great great grandfather Eliseg. Higher up the valley are the iconic remains of Castell Dinas Bran with its distinctly Welsh D shaped tower standing on the earlier Iron Age site. Nearer to Corwen is Owain Glyndŵr's Motte dating to 12th century which our group had previously visited with Fiona. Fiona then brought her talk to a close with mentions of the activities from the Industrial Revolution in the area, briefly lead mining, quarrying, canal construction Pontcysyllte Aquaduct, railways and lead mining. All these activities worthy of more talks!

I apologise for any inaccuracies from my scribbled notes but expect that anyone interested in further reading will find lots of information on the internet.

Once again many thanks to Helen and for her delicious flapjack.

**Suzanne.**

## Chester 9/12/2019

After a very wet and blustery start to the day we enjoyed clear skies, keen winds but thankfully a dry day in Chester. Annabel and Mo had prepared an interesting itinerary for our combined group. We started our tour at the Chester Town Hall where Annabel supplied us with a map and information sheet which she had prepared so that we were able to explore the inside of the High Victorian Gothic building independently. For most of us it was our first visit inside and it certainly did not disappoint. The wonderful craftsmanship of the stone and wood carving and metalwork was much appreciated. The architect was William H Lynn, he took his inspiration from Ypres' Cloth Hall and the Chester Town Hall was opened in 1869. We were free to wander round the committee room, court room, assembly room, council chamber and admire the contents and paintings. On the turn of the stairs are some remarkable 16th century paintings on wood panel of various Earls of Chester dating from the 11th century.-----

Leaving the Town Hall we walked through Abbey Street admiring Georgian houses until we gained the Town walls from where we looked down on the carpark which in times past had been the monks' vegetable plot! We passed the new bell tower, 1975, built from Bethesda slate and Cheshire sandstone. We crossed Eastgate via the bridge with good views from the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Clock, then strolled along Eastgate, noting architectural gems along the way, to view the medieval High Cross which having been damaged in the Civil War and removed was reinstated to its original position in 1975.

Annabel pointed out the Rows on the right hand side of Watergate Street These rows are supposed to be the most authentic and originally had been mainly butchers' shops. In Bridge Street there were several interesting buildings. Number 48 Three Old Arches is reputed to be the earliest shop front in England. Further down Bridge Street there a 3 more buildings which have subsequently become pubs. Each had very individual styled facades. The last one before the Wall was the home of John Lennon's Grandmother for 22 years. We then walked alongside the River, leaving it to go up through the Roman Garden. From there we walked through an arch under the Wall so that we could look at the nine houses. Annabel was particularly interested in these as the horizontal sliding windows were the same as one in her house and this helped to date her home. We then went up onto the Wall and after a short distance we were overlooking the Amphitheatre. We then returned via the Eastgate clock arriving back at the Cathedral at 1pm.



Perfect timing!

Annabel had arranged for us to have lunch in the Cathedral Refectory where a table had been reserved for us and we gradually arrived to enjoy a very nice lunch and a rest after our explorations!

Many warm thanks to Mo and Annabel for a really enjoyable day. Thank you both.

13th January 2020 is Planning Meeting Day. The Strollers meet at 11am for theirs followed at 2pm by The Local History Planning Meeting at Cynwyd Youth Hostel, however, we will both e-mail full details after Christmas but this will give you time to have some thoughts about where you would like to visit next year.

We wish you all a Very Happy and Restful Christmas.  
Very best wishes **Suzanne & Mo**