

Queen Alexandra (1844-1925)

My loft is a bit of an Aladdin's cave and whilst attempting to scale it down a bit I kept coming across lots of interesting things that I'd put away and forgotten about over the years. Sorting can be such a time waster but I did find a little gem that may interest the Royalists and Historians amongst you. It is a postcard of Queen Alexandra's Letter to the Nation, dated May 10th, 1910, which I have transcribed below.

Queen Alexandra's Letter to the Nation

From the depth of my poor broken heart I wish to express to the whole nation and our kind People we love so well, my deep-felt thanks for all their touching sympathy in my overwhelming sorrow and unspeakable anguish.

Not alone have I lost everything in him, my beloved husband, but the Nation too has suffered an irreparable loss by their best friend, father, and Sovereign thus suddenly called away.

May God give us all His Divine help to bear this heaviest of crosses which He has seen fit to lay upon us "His will be done." Give me a thought in your prayers which will comfort and sustain me in all I still have to go through.

Let me take this opportunity of expressing my heart-felt thanks for all the touching letters and tokens of sympathy I have received from all classes, high and low, rich and poor, which are so numerous that I fear it will be impossible for me ever to thank everybody individually.

I confide my dear son into your care, who, I know will follow in his dear father's footsteps, begging you to show him the same loyalty and devotion you showed his dear father.

I know that both my dear son and daughter-in-law will do their utmost to merit and keep it.

May 10, 1910

DRA

(Signed) ALEXAN-

And so, after refreshing my History knowledge I can now impart a few bits about Queen Alexandra herself:

- Alexandra of Denmark was Queen of the United Kingdom & British Dominions and Empress of India 1901-1910.
- She was the daughter of King Christian IX of Norway.
- At 16 she had met Prince Albert Edward, nicknamed Bertie by friends and family, eldest son of Queen Victoria and heir to her throne.
- She was both fashionable and beautiful and they married in 1863 when Albert Edward was Prince of Wales. He was 21 and she 19.
- In 1901 her husband became King Edward VII.
- Her main residence was Marlborough House, London.
- She was Princess of Wales from 1863-1901 and after the death of her husband she became the Dowager Queen.
- Her son became King George V and she was Queen Mother 1910-1925.
- Throughout her marriage her husband was a playboy yet she tolerated his continued relationships with other women and reportedly said "He loved me the most."
- She was heavily involved in charitable causes and many schools and hospitals carry her name.
- She died at Sandringham on November 20th 1925, aged 80.



ANIMAL ANTICS at WATERLOO

Many of you will have seen our goats at the bottom of Sunnybank and our multicoloured ducks wandering around the common, in and out of the brook and enjoying the apparently better mud on the other side of the road, especially after a downpour. Thank you for not running them over! The ducks are now in quarantine in case of the possibility of them catching avian flu and spreading it to the big chicken farms around here.

At the beginning of the year we sold Billy and Bertie, last year's billy kids, but I kept their sisters, Babs and Bunty. Babs managed to break a leg



jumping over a fence, but the vet did a wonderful job, and six months later you'd never guess she once had a broken leg. Soon after that we acquired the services of Robert, a British Alpine billy goat we hired locally to get Annie and Amy in kid. Annie was on heat and she and Robert got on famously. The problem came when we let Robert out on the common with the other goats, and he took a fancy to Amy. Amy wasn't on heat so she raced off, jumping fences, careering in and out of the garden, with Robert in hot pursuit. The next day Robert was sent home in disgrace. He did return another day when Amy was feeling more amenable, and as a result, later in the summer, Annie gave birth to Chester, and Amy to Charlie and Chuck, all of them billy kids.

Chester soon began to take after his dad, and very quickly learned to jump on the stable roof, over the garden fence, and basically anywhere he wasn't supposed to go. He was a cheeky chappie, but it was with some relief that we sold him as a pet to a lovely couple from the Wirral.

Charlie and Chuck went as pets to a new home in Kidwelly, and on the way back we picked up a Golden Guernsey Billy called Eric, who has huge, impressive horns



but is thankfully very placid and friendly. Eric is staying until the New Year, and will hopefully help Amy, Annie, Babs and Bunty to present us with a new crop of kids later in the year. Amy and Annie have been keeping us well supplied with milk, some of which Penny turns into goats cheese, using the whey to make tasty soups.

The ducks have been even more productive. As well as laying eggs all year round, the ducks have hatched a grand total of 25 ducklings this year, which took us up to a total of 40 ducks at one stage, the most we've ever had and more than making up for Foxy Loxy's raids. The huge yolks in these eggs make them very popular, with many of the bigger eggs weighing in at over 3oz. If any of you are able to drop off a bag of large size egg boxes, we would be very grateful as we are getting low!

Penny & Ifor Williams

FARM FOCUS

Ty Llwyd is a typical Radnorshire hill farm. We have speckle/Welsh hill sheep on the Begwyns as well as a flock of Texel cross ground sheep. A small suckler herd of Hereford and Lim cross who all have names, and Seren teaches tricks to.



We stand a Show jumping stallion at stud called "Condor" who previously travelled around Europe jumping up to 1.50m in Grand Prix classes. He now has a different lifestyle bedded on fern, living across



from cattle and chatting to trotters. We also have hunter liveries, DIY liveries, National Hunt broodmares and breed sport horses. We have two mares due to foal this spring. "Schalke" whom we bred has recently started running, and was a good second in a bumper. Steve still feels the need for speed after retiring from Point to pointing, and now trains and drives in local harness racing.

I run several social media platforms defending our industry, including badger cull pages and fighting against the misinformation spread about farming within the mainstream media. Seren enjoys looking after the stock, is a dab hand at driving the quad and Landy and is a great help around the farm. Seren is very interested in biodiversity and wildlife habitat and is hoping to study these subjects in university.

Angharad, Steve and Seren Lloyd.



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RECORDING HISTORY

I grew up on a farm on the north side of the Brecon Beacons overlooking the Usk valley, in the 1950s and 60s. It was a typical small cattle and sheep farm, where we milked a few cows and kept a flock of Welsh mountain sheep. Our sheep were on the hill during the summer months, like nearly all the neighbouring farms, and I spent many hours riding my pony and shepherding the flock. My family and I would also sometimes go for a walk up on the hill on a Sunday afternoon, or in an evening. On one occasion we met one of our neighbours, a bachelor who lived with his brother and sister on the neighbouring farm. He was in his sixties, and suffered from rheumatism, so it was a surprise to see him so far from home. We stopped to talk and he told us about the healing well that was on the hill near the forestry. He told us he would drink the water, and soak his feet in the well, to help with his rheumatism. Although my parents had moved to Pantllefrith during the winter storm of 1947, they had never heard of this well, so Hugh showed us where it was and told us it was called 'Fynna Rhytha Bytha'. We continued to make visits to the well once or twice a year until my parents retired to Brecon in 1976.

When I married and moved to Painscastle, I forgot about the well on the hill above Pencelli. In 2009, I started to make enquiries of some of the 'locals' in the area to see if they knew about its existence. I looked up maps and archaeological reports of the area, but there was no mention of 'my well'. No-one appeared to have heard of it and so I decided I must go and find it. I contacted Sarah Osbourne, who I had known since childhood. She had never heard of the well either, despite living close by, but she was very willing to help me try to find it. We walked up onto the hill and I explained all I could about how it looked; that was easy, I remembered it like a bath, with water coming into one end. However, the position on the hill was more problematical as it was forty years since I had last been there. I thought that the overflow from the well ran into the Cwy Brook, but I was not sure how far above the stream the well was. We walked and walked! Sarah nearly walked to the top of the Bryn and every time she found a pool of water, whatever size, she would ask, "Is this it"? Having spent most of the day searching, we decided we would have to give up. I was despondent, but the thought that the overflow went into the stream made me suggest that we walk home along the bank of the Cwy Brook. After a little while, I noticed some unusual rocks in the stream. I had seen them before; I felt sure this was the place! I climbed up the bank from the stream; the area was completely covered in gorse. I tracked the line of the overflow and at last I found it. Sarah looked shocked when I suddenly disappeared into the 'well', which was completely covered over with gorse and briars. We had found it! I pulled at the gorse and found where the water was still trying to trickle in. The walls were covered over so it gave no clue to the size or shape of our 'find'.



The well completely covered by gorse

I returned home happy, but anxious to arrange a work party to re-discover my 'well'. Sarah was a willing volunteer, along with Carol Redford from Llanfrynach and a little less enthusiastic, daughter Kate. Off we set with as many tools as we could muster and two dogs who were very excited about the expedition. After a hard day of clearing the surrounding gorse and other bushes, we found the well, just as I had remembered it. The two end walls were made from up-ended rock, while the side walls were mostly of laid stones. A lot of mud had accumulated over forty years and so after removing the excess the 'well' was back to its former glory.



I contacted the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, who are based in Aberystwyth. I met David Leighton and showed him the well and explained what I knew. We discussed its name, which we thought may well be a corruption of Ffynnon Rhyd y Beddau; he thought this quite likely as there are Bronze Age burial mounds on the ridge above the well:- <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/411836/details/ffynnon-rhyd-y-beddau-bryn-water-basin#images>.

According to the Royal Commission, it is a water basin or tank, but how old it is no-one knows. I like to imagine it was part of an ancient community, perhaps hundreds of years ago. Ffynnon Rhyd y Beddau means "the well by the ford of graves". It is now a fairly isolated spot on common land just outside Talybont Forest, very near to the source of the Cwy Brook. Was this once a traditional route through the Brecon Beacons? Was this 'well' a remnant of previous occupation, or a place of pilgrimage for healing? Whatever it was, or is, it is now officially recorded, so it should not get lost again.



Mo Lloyd

HISTORY BITES - ELFAEL

Elfael was one of the commotes of Rhwyng Gwy y Hafren (between the Wye and the Severn) before the Norman invasion. It is the southern area of Radnorshire. The castle in Painscastle, which was built by Payne Fitz John sometime around 1130, became the administrative centre for the area under the Normans. At various times it became divided into Elfael Uwch Mynydd and Elfael Is Mynydd (Elfael above and below the mountain—this was the hill running from Erwood in the South West to Glaschw in the North East).

When the Maesllwch estate was bought by the Wilkins/DeWinton family in 1771 it was still regarded as a Manor. Court leets were held every six months in the name of the Lord of the Manor. These were held in the Drovers Arms, now the Roast Ox. A Court Leet, Court Baron and View of Frankpledge were held for both the Manor of Elfael Is Mynydd and the Borough of Painscastle.

A mayor and a constable, sometimes two, were elected for the borough of Painscastle annually. The constables were responsible for recording encroachments and also acted as pound keepers. The pound for the village was on the hill road just above the Adullam Chapel. Encroachments on the hill were subject to fines at the next Court Leet.



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Mar 15th Apr 5th Apr 26th May 17th

Garden waste is collected every fortnight on Mondays from March to November for an annual fee, next collections:

Mar 8th Mar 22nd Apr 5th Apr 19th May 5th

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations on a first grandchild for Helen & Mark Haines, Cwmgwannon, Clyro. Best wishes to Lucy and Cameron on the birth of a baby boy, Finley Solomon Michael Malcolm on 22nd January 2021. Soloman and Michael named from the two great grandads. Lucy, Cameron and Finley now live at Dorking in Surrey.

Congratulations to Andrew & Ffiona Kettle on the birth of their first baby, Alffie John Kettle born 20th February 2021. [Ketts is an ex Rhosgoch Rangers player and also a member of Rhosgoch Golf Club. They now live in Llangurig.]

Best wishes to all

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QUIRKY QUOTES

I feel like I should clean the house, so I'm going to sit down and do some reading until the feeling passes.

Worry is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do but gets you nowhere.

Life is a little more honest after a few beers.

If at first you don't succeed, find out if the loser gets anything. - Bill Lyon

I try to take one day at a time but sometimes several days attack me at once.

Go the extra mile – it's never crowded!

Normality is a paved road: it's comfortable to walk, but no flowers grow on it - Vincent Van Gogh

When people try to rain on your parade, poke them in the eye with your umbrella.

Weird is a side effect of being awesome.

Sometimes I pretend to be normal but it gets boring so I go back...

Be anything but predictable!



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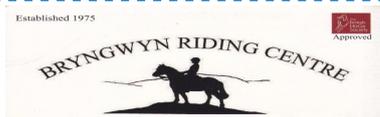


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ERWOOD & PAINSCASTLE CHURCHES

My Dear Friends,

The signs of Spring are here and many of us have had our first vaccination. We pray that the light of Christ is being seen and felt within the love and healing power of all around us.

What an uplifting experience to visit the Showground for the job! How unexpected. On a freezing winter's night, we were met by the dedicated helpers and staff with such dedication; all showing a determination to lift people's spirits and dispel any fear that may be present in the people. The building glowed with optimism. The regulations, signs, masks and the lines on the floor did not seem to hinder the deep sense of care and fellowship as everyone swiftly and in a relaxed manner awaited their turn. Everyone seemed conscious of everyone else and kept their two - metre distance naturally without needing to adjust to the markers in place. There was gentle laughter and chatter. I was conscious of the link between us all as human warmth flowed through the lines; although the people in front and behind were each two-metres away, it felt as though I was standing close to them and that the building was more full of people than it appeared to be.

I would venture that this feeling of fullness and closeness indicates the presence of God's healing angels among us when they are needed to work with those who are giving healing. Through this, quite simply, it may be said that the Christ was in the place, indeed it felt like he was bridging the gap between each one of us and that his joy was tangible. This is the same feeling of fullness and power that may often be felt in hospitals when there are moments of sadness, crisis and emergency or through the simple daily routine of ongoing healing and rest

To be part of this awareness takes away fear and conveys a new sense of freedom that may counteract any debilitating sadness. We are given an insight into the peace that Christ was bestowing on his disciples at the Last Supper as he said:

"Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or let them be afraid."

The peace and freedom that we long for cannot then be ours totally through the things of this world and does require a deep sense of trust and faith. This is so difficult when we are still being pressed by restrictions or surrounded by grief and sadness. Last year, as our Lord was facing the cross, we were entering the darkest time in the current crisis (so we thought). How fitting that a year later we enter the time of Lent as the crisis seems to be easing and our hearts are lifting yet still we feel the shackles of necessary restrictions weighing down our lives. Likewise, one of the lessons of Lent is to let the distractions fall away from us that restrict the fullness of our healing

union with God.

To focus on the things we do not have may make us want them all the more and this desire for having will itself become a restriction that takes away our freedom for higher thoughts and diminishes our power to love. How we long to see those we miss and comfort our dearest who need our physical presence and feel the security of some kind of what we know as normality- but dwelling on this is to enter a place of torture. Let us not focus on loss but on the inherent wonder that is also present within the world of inspiration and toil; the miracle of vaccines, the hard work of all the healers, the workers and all who embody the best of all that makes us human, then our own sufferings may find a place in the wider perspective of God's love. We are allowed to rest within the view of a vista without boundaries that discloses the love and goodwill of all that has ever been done to ease the pain of people throughout the history of the world.

Experiencing this is true freedom. We may not be given an easy peace yet it is an indestructible peace. Through this peace the love for our families and friends becomes a universal love that unites us all and makes our healing power much greater. Through this love, God in Christ is within us and among us, his love carrying our humanity through the cross to the glory of the Resurrection.

We are celebrating the Resurrection on
Easter Day in Llanbedr Church at 10.30am.
*May God bless you and those you love
and keep you safe and well in his loving
arms
now and always.*

EDITOR'S NOTES

I hope you enjoy this edition of the 'Gossip'. Thanks to so many people who have sent contributions in during this difficult time. Check out Sylvia's piece on coping strategies we all need those, not just for world-wide pandemics but also for personal or local crises. Why not send an email with your observations or philosophies? Apologies to the Waterloo residents, not sure how they missed the last issue but hope they will forgive us and we look forward to further catch-ups in the future. James Martin tells of his 'time in the hills' many of you must have stories to tell perhaps before you arrived in Radnorshire! I would also like to thank our delivery team for their outstanding efforts. Please continue to send articles, news, etc, all comments are gratefully received. Deadline for next issue [May/June 2021] - 30th April 2021. [mlloydundy@outlook.com or 01497-851609].

Articles are the opinion of the respective writers. All errors and omissions excepted (E&OE) .

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Lockdown Strategies.

Many of us, I'm sure, will have developed strategies to help us through these trying times. The first lockdown was relatively easy with cloudless skies, sunshine and warmth for days on end.

Even the most stable of us, however, probably had times when everything seemed too much to bear, and throughout the long, cold winter months with shorter days and long, lonely evenings, the task of remaining positive has been considerably more arduous.

I thought it may be helpful (to me at least) to have some record of my coping strategies.

Ray and I enjoy walking, and get out most days when the weather is not too inclement. We enjoy playing Rummicub, or cards, which stimulates our grey matter, as well as sharing companionship. On this note also, we do crosswords together, but Sudoku is strictly my province, as Ray has no intention of mastering such a complicated formula.

Those of you who know me well are aware of my passion for needlecraft. This has really been my life-saver as I have continued with my 'Stitch-in-Time' project, whereby I undertake repairs and alterations for friends and family in exchange for a donation to my favourite charity, The Bracken Trust. Since the beginning of the pandemic, this has generated over £700 so far. Tasks to date include altering clothes, replacing zips, shortening curtains and (my most favourite) making doll's clothes.

Loads of reading helped take me into different worlds – I particularly enjoy biographies and historical novels. Last of all, I've revived my interest in yoga, and do some stretches and simple poses to help keep the ageing process in check.

I so enjoy being part of this group and hearing all the news about this beautiful area, which I feel privileged to call my home.

Sylvia Bigglestone

HANDY HINTS

These are actual printed instructions:

On hair dryer: Do not use while sleeping. (Do those 1,500 watts really lull you to sleep?)

On a bag of Fritos: You could be a winner! No purchase necessary. Details inside. (Are they encouraging us to steal the packet?)

On a bar of Dial soap: Use like regular soap. (What else might we do with it?) [When I looked on Amazon to see this type of soap, it was offering used along with new!]

On a frozen dinner: Serving suggestions – defrost. (Do you own utensils that can cut through a side of frozen beef?)

On a Korean kitchen knife: Warning – keep out of children.

On an American Airlines packet of nuts: Open packet, eat nuts. (So without those instructions, what would we do with them?)

On a Swedish chainsaw: Do not attempt to stop with your hands. (I don't want to think of the alternative)

On children's cough medicine: Do not drive car or operate machinery. (How many children drive a Mercedes or operate a crane?)

QUIRKY QUOTES

A good laugh heals a lot of hurts

Rock Follies

During the year I have shared a couple of quirky poems that Victor's Uncle Tom (aka Tom The Cefn) would recite at local "dos". As well as being quite a storyteller, Uncle Tom was skilful at making corn dollies and got invited to demonstrate his craft at local functions, including the Women's Institute.

One evening he went along to Bryngwyn W I to show them Corn Dolly making when they turned tables on him with a poem of their own and this is what they did! I'm not exactly sure of when this could have been but I would guess possibly the 1970s or early 1980s.

A little poem entitled: ROCK FOLLIES - dedicated to Mr Tom Williams.

When Tom Williams came to W I
To demonstrate Corn Dollies,
We did a little dance for him
And we called it Rock Follies.
Poor Tom, he'd never seen such things
Bobbing up, down and bouncing.
Said he, I'll never get over this
I'm here and now announcing.
It was too much, Tom spun around
And fell down to the ground.
We picked him up and sat him down
And said, here drink this tea.
We popped a drop of Brandy in it,
That will make you better you'll see.
Poor Tom went home and went to bed,
He tossed, he dreamed, he shouted
Rock Dollies, Corn Follies, Rock Follies, Corn Dollies
And then he fell out of bed.
I'll never be able to make Rock Dollies said he
It will drive me right out of my head,
And I'll never go to W I again
To demonstrate CORN DOLLIES,
And I never want again to see
Bryngwyn W I's silly ROCK FOLLIES.

PS: If there is anyone who remembers this I would love to hear from you.

Cherry Williams

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POWYS PRATTLES
by County Councillor James Gibson-Watt

Powys County Council's annual Budget-setting process reminds me of the film Groundhog Day, in which *Gossip* readers may recall the same things happen to the main character from one day to the next, only in the Council's case it's from one year to next – the Council's Cabinet agrees a draft Budget that includes more cuts to some services and an above-inflation Council Tax increase; I, as the Leader of the Opposition, try to get opposition groups' agreement on an Alternative Budget that proposes a lower Council Tax increase and funding restored to the services facing cuts, this year with complete agreement, only to be told by the Council's Chief Finance Officer that she will not allow the Alternative to be presented for debate at Council, even though it balances perfectly, as she considers it too risky! Of course, I do rather know this is going to happen. There is no way that the Chief Finance Officer is going to allow an Alternative Budget proposing a lower Council Tax increase than the Cabinet's onto the Agenda. It might win a majority and that would never do. One might think the issue of 'risk' is one for councillors to decide, not an officer, but that's not how it works.

This pantomime (or tragi-comedy) happens every year. So the Council is always presented with a 'take it or leave it' choice. Although I and my opposition colleagues voted against the Cabinet's 2021/22 Budget motion with its (yet again) above-inflation 2.9% Council Tax increase and further funding cuts to libraries and theatres, we narrowly lost. Since the current Conservative/Independent coalition was formed in 2017, Council Taxes have increased by over 26% in just four years. Some of the councillors who voted for these increases pledged to oppose any increases in Council Tax when they stood in the 2017 council elections. Politicians eh?

Hey ho, Spring seems to be in the air, the days are lengthening and we had a great show of daffodils for St David's Day; and Wales beat England in the rugby! The coronavirus pandemic is subsiding, following our lengthy winter lockdown, and the vaccine programme is forging ahead. In fact, despite some early stick handed out to Wales's Health Minister about the pace of the roll out, Wales has vaccinated the highest proportion of its population with the first jab of all the UK nations, with Powys the most of any health board area in Wales. Early years pupils are back in school with other age groups to follow shortly and life may, just may, be inching towards normality. But all depends on infection rates falling further, which means all of us sticking to the lockdown rules for now. 'Normality' will not of course be 'normal'. Some things have changed for ever. Very many people have suffered and too many have died from the virus. As we emerge from hibernation into the Spring, I suspect our feelings will be more poignant sadness than joie de vivre.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL NEWS

Chairman, David Nicholls, Castlefield Close
Vice-chairman, Sian Powell, Lletycoed
Jenny Smith, Penrhiw
Becky Miles, The Cwm
Iris Lloyd, Caemawr
Andrew Ritchie, Castle Brook
Bruce Evans, Lower Pentre

Clerk: Marion Hughes, Waun y Pentre 01497 851628

Post Office Bus

A Post Office Bus is coming to Clyro from Whitney on Wye on a Tuesday at 13.45 until 14.45, parking by the Baskerville.

ASSEMBLY NEWS

It is with some disbelief and certainly with sadness that I write this, my last article, in the *Gossip* as Member of the Senedd for Brecon and Radnorshire.

In May it will have been 22 years since I was first elected to represent the people of our incredible area in the new Welsh parliament. It remains the proudest day of my political career. And to work over these decades for our communities has been the honour of my life.

To be the parliamentarian for Brecon and Radnorshire is not to own the seat or constituency, it is to be a steward of it – for me, following in the footsteps of Welsh Liberal giants and hopefully being able to pass the baton on.

I am honoured to have worked alongside former MPs Richard Livsey and Roger Williams, true public servants who loved our area and its communities.



Over the years, I have fought amongst other things for our community hospitals, for infrastructure, for rural schools, for the Nurse Staffing Levels Act and the Pupil Development Grant, which continues to support our most disadvantaged pupils. There have certainly been highs and lows, from battles to save our community hospitals, including a bed push for Bronllys, fighting to retain libraries, the Foot and Mouth crisis and now Coronavirus.

Political life has changed immeasurably in the last two decades. When I first started, the vast majority of correspondence was by landline or letter, mobile phones were not so predominant and I had to call the Office each morning to find out what I was doing that particular day! The only way we could then contact then MP Richard Livsey as he travelled around the constituency was by CB!



I wouldn't like to say how many local shows, vintage rallies, village fetes, advice surgeries and whist drives I have been to and some town hall meetings have required negotiating skills that would test the Secretary-General of the UN! But I have always loved these events and the chance to get out and about as much as possible to see and talk to constituents. In my view, this is the one of the most important parts of the job and it is a shame there has not been as much opportunity to do this over the past year.

Above all else, I would like to thank the people of Brecon and Radnorshire for their support and for their trust in me. I have said it before and I remain in no doubt that our constituency is truly the greatest anyone could have the privilege of representing.

Kirsty Williams

NEWS FROM WESTMINSTER

Good news has been hard to come by lately but with some early Spring sun shining down on us – and a fair chance of a good showing in the Six Nations – some much-needed optimism has been restored at last.

Without a doubt, the most positive news in many months has been the rollout of the Coronavirus vaccine. It's been a privilege for me to see the vaccine centre up close as a volunteer at the mass vaccination centre in Builth Wells. All of the volunteers have been coordinated by PAVO and it is a wonderful experience to help people as they come for their jabs. I really cannot thank everyone involved in the vaccine rollout enough. From the volunteers, to the vaccinators, Powys Teaching Health Board and the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society; everyone has worked their socks off to make this rollout possible – including the GPs who are vaccinating in surgeries too. However, on one shift, it was sad that 45 people did not turn up for their appointments. Please – if you are not able to attend your appointment, let the Health Board know. There is a fantastic reserve list system which is set up for those who can make it with little notice to ensure no vaccine goes unused.

One piece of news which recently put a smile on my face was the announcement that the UK Government intends to create a Veterans Commissioner for Wales. I called for this during the Armed Forces Bill debate last month and I'm delighted that we've got such quick progress. From the many veterans who get in touch with me, it is clear that they deserve someone on their side who will ensure they get the resources they need. It is superb that the UK Government has wasted little time in doing this.

Recently my inbox has been flooded with concerns from many families regarding Clyro School. I have been working closely with the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher to try and resolve the issue, but it is a complicated and thorny problem which might take some time to work through. It is disappointing to see local councillors sharing conspiracy theories on social media and frightening members of the community. I fully appreciate how important the school is to many people but it is deeply unhelpful to suggest that the school is closing; this is not part of the plans and, to avoid inflaming the situation, it's important we stick to the facts.

As I write, Wales is still without a Lockdown Exit Plan – unlike our friends and neighbours in England. I think it is sad that we are not trusted with the same level of information. Our tourism and hospitality businesses could get themselves ready for reopening if they knew what to aim for. Everyone understands that our vigilance on Coronavirus restrictions is important to a successful reopening but with dates and a direction of travel comes hope and confidence for the future. Sadly, we're not allowed that in Wales but I hope that will change soon.

I hope those of you that are busy with lambing at this time of year are getting off to a good start. It's one of the best times of year to live in Brecon and Radnorshire and my best wishes to you all for plenty of easy sets of twins and a few hours of sleep!

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LIFE AT LUNDY

Well would you believe it, I have been asked to write another episode of Life at Lundy? I really think Mo has lost all her friends as no-one has wanted to write anything for 'The Gossip'. Well she can always rely on us dogs! Of course it may be because the humans have had this message STAY AT HOME, and they are afraid to go out because they may catch something. So of course they haven't been doing much, while we canines are always busy.

So I will have to tell you our news. I suppose the big news last

time was my new brothers and sisters.

Well they have all gone. People kept coming and taking one and then another and



8 puppies in a pile

the last one left was called Tess. She was going to live at the Rhos with Lindsey, Darren, Erin, Ava and Oscar so she needed a few extra days to get her strength up. When they were just about to leave home they were quite fun to play with, but it seems as soon as I find a friend to play with something happens to them.

I used to play with the 4 hens then they became 3, then 2, then there was only 1. Even she has disappeared now. However, the hen house has moved, not on its own of course, Matthew helped, then Pam, Abbie and Paige cleaned it out. A few days later along came some new occupants. They are like the old hens although smaller, they have a run which is either to keep them in or me out, I am not quite sure which. It does keep me out, but some of them seem to find a way to sneak out. I expect it is because they want to play with me.

Mo has told me that it will soon be lambing time and that means everyone gets very busy and the humans get grumpy. Gyp says she enjoys it as Mo and her have lots of little jobs to do. Lundy are not supposed to lamb until April when the weather will be lovely, well that was what Mo thinks! Anyway, the other day there was great excitement as there was a little lamb in the field. Gyp told me that she and Mo were given the job of getting mum and baby out from their friends and into their own field. It seems that once they have a baby they need to be in a different field. Gyp told me it was a very scientific job, which is why I couldn't help as I am only an apprentice, but even Joe wasn't allowed to help as apparently Mo thought his 'brute force and ignorance' tactics would not be very helpful! So we have the 'single field' - all we need is a bit of company for the new arrival.

I told you last time that I had moved to a new house, but that the roof was temporary until 'they' found time to do it properly. It seems to me that Lundy men never have time, as it is still the same. During that very wet weather there was rain coming in because the roof had slipped, luckily Mo managed to move it back. I was luckier than mum 'Gyp' - her roof blew off completely one stormy night. Luckily it didn't blow too far and Mo put it back and put a bigger weight on it to keep it in place.

I will let you know next time if my house is completed, but I am not holding my breath.

Sweep

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PAINSCASTLE BUS SHELTER

Please remember to take any old postage stamps or old bras to the bus shelter to help raise funds for The Bracken Trust in Llandrindod Wells.

Old printer cartridges are also required for re-cycling, to raise money for the Centre of Alternative Technology. It must be a virgin cartridge ie an original cartridge eg HP, Lexmark; a cartridge that has not been refilled previously and a cartridge that does not carry any other branding than the original (Cartridge World, Tesco, Asda not allowed).
For more details please email Lucy Trench: lucy@66sg.net

Berger de Montagne (Mountain herdsman)

Dedication:

To Mo, who asked me to write this account of my experience of transhumance in the Swiss Alps in the 1970s. I would never have got round to it otherwise.

Berger de Montagne (Mountain herdsman)

Well I finished University with a good 2:1, confident of finding a decent job fairly quickly. But Arts graduates were not in great demand in 1976, so after wasting the best part of a year looking for work, I decided to try my luck overseas. I packed up my old kitbag (literally) and set off.

I headed for Brussels first, because I had some ex-university friends who had settled there, Chilean refugees from Pinochet's regime. They kindly put me up in their spacious, rundown flat.

Sure enough, I was able to get a job as a casual "bricoleur", supposedly a handyman, but in reality a dog-body (just as well with my non-existent handyman skills), pushing brooms, breaking up cement, disposing of rubbish, etc. I was happy enough, and my French became more useable than the university variety, but I remained on the lookout. I got chatting with a work chum from Switzerland and he suggested cow herding in the Alps. "They are always looking for people," he said. I didn't stop to wonder why that might be. But with The Sound of Music running through my head, I set off once more, thumbing my way down the border, almost directly down the battle front of WW1. That route and my kitbag filled my head up with wartime songs and fragments of poems while I was waiting for a lift. I must have been a very dreamy young man.

In Belgium I was mistaken for German, in Lorraine I was taken for a German speaking Frenchman, and in Switzerland anyone I spoke to was dismayed that the English, of all people, should come looking for work. What is the world coming to, seemed to be the general response.

Arriving in Sion, I checked into the cheapest place I could find (which was far more than I could afford) and made a beeline for the jobcentre. There a solemn official informed me that I couldn't work in Switzerland without a Diploma. Diploma was required for every job, he said, What, even cleaning? Yes, Cleaning Diploma. Labouring? Absolutely, Labouring Diploma. What kind of job was I hoping for, he asked - looking at me with obvious scepticism that I was fit for any kind of employment whatever, and to tell you the truth, sitting there far from home, with very little money in my pocket, I was rather starting to feel the same.

Well, I said, I had heard that there were always vacancies for *berger de montagne*, mountain herdsman in the season? He looked at me very directly and said "is that what you want to do? Well we may be able to help you after all". Off he went to make a phone call. I could have sworn he was grinning. On the whole I preferred the solemnity...

So I walked across town and out of town until I came to the farmhouse where the first person I met was Pieter Willisich, who was a big man with a big moustache and a kind face. He asked me a few questions, and our first conversation went something like this.

M. Willisich: So you want to be a mountain herdsman?

Me: Yes, very much.

M. Willisich: It's hard, up there, you know. This isn't Provence.

Me: That doesn't bother me.

M. Willisich: What do you do in your own country?

Me: I'm a gardener (lies, but it sounded better than an unemployed Eng. Lit. graduate)

M. Willisich: Do you know how to milk?

Me: No.

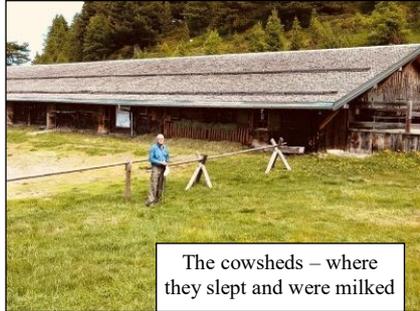
M. Willisich: Hmm. OK it's nearly a month before we go up. You can come here and stay with us. And we'll see if you can work. We'll teach you to milk. You'll get your food and you can share a room with my boys. When we get up there you'll get a thousand francs a month. Paid at the end. That

goes for you?

We shook hands. I was so happy!

There followed a month of very hard work and pretty good fun. There were three sons, Max, Medaar and Pieter, and we all slept in the same room. They were all German speakers, and they spoke in German among themselves. Their French was at about the same level as mine, so communication was OK. Up before dawn, straight into the cowshed for milking. It didn't take long to get the hang of it, although I was very slow. I speeded up later, but they were still milking two for every one I did. I also learnt that cows can kick sideways, as well as administer a nasty slap round the face with a shitty tail. One morning, having attached the suction to three teats, and looking for the fourth, I was

baffled to find this cow had only three. I got up off my milking stool and had a good look at the animal. It had the normal number yesterday. I got back down and had a good look under it and there was Medaar, grinning and pulling up one teat behind the udder. He was a good natured guy and we had a laugh.



The cowsheds – where they slept and were milked

In the evenings we would clean up and go downtown for a beer or carafe of Fendant, the lovely fragrant white wine of the Valais. Sometimes I went by myself, and shocked the waitress by ordering 3 decilitres of wine for myself. "Three decilitres of wine and just one glass! You must be a drunkard". I was in turn shocked at a waitress commenting on my drinking habits. Later I went there more often, and she turned out to be a sweet young woman by the name of Veronique, with happy eyes and a lovely smile.

Between milking we started haying, and my job, of course, was hauling bales – around, oh – maybe several thousand. I stopped counting after a bit. I learnt to milk, more or less, and I could haul bales as well as the next chap: but Max, who only came up to my shoulder, was wiry and hard as iron and I was told that he once dragged an enormous bull from one end of the farmyard to another with just his fingers in its nostrils. I was seriously impressed. None of them ever complained of fatigue. I once said I was tired and this provoked a storm of laughter, and after that they teasingly gave me the nickname of "Monsieur Fatigué"

At last the big day came and the lorries arrived to collect the cows. The trucks backed in and the drivers put the ramps down. We coaxed the cows onto the ramps. Most went quietly. The refuseniks had their tails twisted and hopped up pretty smartish. It seemed rather unkind, but as I knew nothing about how to get a recalcitrant cow onto a lorry, I kept my mouth shut.

Everyone, every son and cousin and uncle, had been pressed into service. We drove up to what was then called Mayens de Riddes. *Mayens* is, I think, an old Swiss word for the gathering point for the herds that are going up to the high pastures. (Now the name has changed to La Tzoumaz)

Mayens de Riddes was a ski resort even then, but a very modest one. There was a chair lift going up to Croix de Coeur, a single café restaurant with rooms, and half a dozen chalets. Now it is a major winter ski and summer holiday resort for families, with 50 or so hotels and literally hundreds of chalets and scores of apartment blocks. I went back in 2018 and I could scarcely recognise it.

At Mayens de Riddes we met more lorries with cows, heifers and calves from other establishments from all over Switzerland. There was a jolly atmosphere as we all rounded them up into the cowsheds and filled their baskets with hay.

Then we all tucked into bread, cheese, salami and beer. We milked them all and collapsed into bed. Mrs Willisch and a few of her female family and friends had made the beds and set up the kitchen and done a few other things for us. I had many reasons to be grateful to this kind woman, who seemed to take a protective, motherly sort of liking to me.

In the following days I learnt a lot of new things: how to put my hands into near boiling water to wash the milking gear; how to carry a full churn on my back (weighs over 100 pounds). After three days the rain came down and the track to the meadow turned to deep, thick mud. I learnt how to follow the cows through the mud without losing my wellies. I failed to stop the herd (the animals mostly had horns) from mashing up the car of some unfortunate resident who was driving the opposite way from the herd. He used some dreadful language of which "espece de con!" was the mildest, and many of which I could only partially understand, (but could easily guess) and without once saying "Excuse my French". I learnt above all that cows from different herds had no cohesion: and where there were no fences to hold them, they would wander off where the fancy took them. My job was to keep counting them and walk round and round to stop them disappearing into the trees or adjoining meadows. I covered a lot of ground, running round in huge circles on steep ground to keep them together.

There were five of us. Max, the owner's son, a school-boy whose name I forget, and an old and quite frail old boy called, yes, Adolf. The fifth was 'monieur le patron', although he often disappeared to the café to drink schnapps, and then, after a week, he started to drive home and come back at the weekends. I was the only one that went out with the cows. The rest were occupied in cleaning up and making cheese. The big round cheeses were stored in the loft.

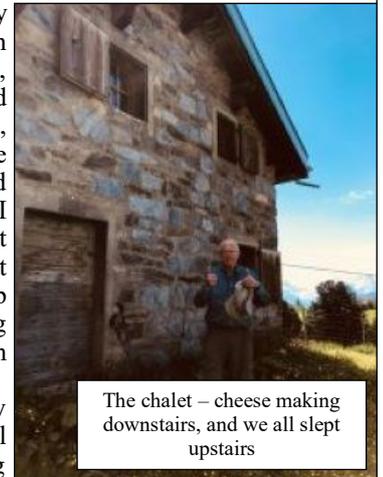
We got up every morning while it was still dark – to maximise grazing time, the boss said. I brought them back each evening in the dusk. I discovered that it was impossible to stop a herd of cows from diverting to a water trough 100 yards off the path and down a near vertical slope on their way home. But I made an unholy fool of myself trying before I realised.

The rain kept on coming down. I was soaked and miserable. The kindly Mr Willisch brought me a mac and a pair of gloves. Everyone was wet, irritable and snappish. I got blisters on my feet and cut a hole in my shoe to give the worst one some room. Mr Willisch said "Ah yes, I noticed that you had stopped running at last. Thank God for that."

A good Samaritan in a nearby chalet, seeing me limping, gave me half a tube of ointment that effected a near-miraculous cure. God bless her! I shall always remember this kindness from a stranger.

After a week or so the rain stopped. M. Willisch announced that were going to move up the mountain the following day. So there was a bustle as we all packed up – churns, milking machines, generator, the big cauldron and the firewood and all the associated equipment, which I never saw in use because it was always washed and packed up by the time I had brought in "les bêtes" (the beasts), never 'les vaches', for some reason.

So in the morning we milked the cows and instead of leading them out to the meadow in the usual way we penned them into smallish area in a hastily erected enclosure of wooden posts and 3-strands of barbed wire fence. When the vans and cars had gone off with all our kit, we opened up a section of



The chalet – cheese making downstairs, and we all slept upstairs

fence to the animals, and started to lead them up the mountain tracks. One big red cow with huge horns and the neck and shoulders of a bull, who was usually at the front of the herd, did not agree with this way of proceeding, and just walked straight at the fence, picking up the posts and three strands of barbed wire and kept on going. I was stunned. I tried to stop her, but she took no notice of me or my switch and just kept on. She walked and walked with her head up and one by one the strands of barbed wire went ping, and she hurried ahead to be number one cow.

Up at the top (about two thousand metres), once we had settled down, life seemed easier for a bit : then they doubled the size of the herd by adding 56 heifers and calves. Oddly enough it was flatter up there, but I went cross-eyed counting them as they never stood still, and I wore myself out running round in circles. My feet were covered with a layer of hard callous, and I spent a lot of time barefoot. I could put out a cigarette end with my bare sole.

The rain stopped. The days became repetitive. The food was very monotonous, bread and cheese and milk in unlimited quantities for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Sometimes Adolf made a ghastly soup out of soup powder. Once he used double the amount of soup powder and the result was so salty as to be inedible. Max ladled litres of cream into the soup, and it became edible. Just.

Every Sunday Mr Willisch would come up to see us and everyone would get a plastic bag containing a salami, a big bar of chocolate, and cigarettes or tobacco. No beer, never. Or wine. Probably just as well.

I used to leave my lunch in a plastic bag, hung on a branch. One day an enterprising heifer found it and thinking, I suppose, that it probably had more calories than grass, wolfed the lot. I hung it up higher after that. Once or twice a cow came up behind me to try the taste of my hair.

One day I lost a cow. Mr Willisch had joined me briefly (a rare event) and was sitting on the grass beside me. The herd was still for once, all lying down chewing the cud. After a bit he stood up whistling and looked around. "How many beasts have you got?", he said. "108, of course", I replied. "Count" he said. I counted. 107.

"And I bet I can tell you which one is missing. You know the little grey? The one with the pretty teats? She's a specialist escaper". Well I didn't like to tell him that I only looked at a cow's teats to fit them into a suction cup, and I had never really considered any cow's teats as pretty. These men really knew their animals, lived alongside them. They could even recognise the voices of their own cows in the herd. Once Max got out of bed when there was a great bellowing at night and said "*Das ist Rieval!*" (that's Rieval!). Then, opening the window, he called out "*Rieval! Sie Still!*" (Rieval, be quiet!) and it worked too.

Mr Willisch said, "You can forget about sleeping tonight until you have found her!" and suggested that I should set off back downhill towards Mayens de Riddes. This was actually a ski run in the winter, I found out. We were allowed to graze there because it kept the grass short for the skiers. For the same reason we were not allowed to put up any fences. So off I went looking for a stray cow somewhere in the Alps. Somewhere.

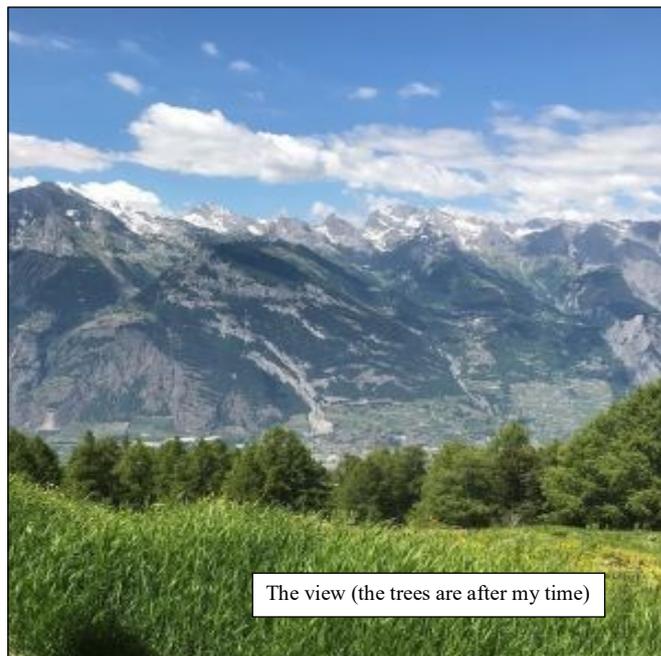
On the way I met some interesting people. First a couple of young Dutch hikers, who spoke perfect English, said that they had spotted some fresh dung.

I came down to Mayens and turned towards our original base a mile away, and there I came across a real eye-opener. Two dozen sleek, well-groomed, fat cows grazing peacefully in a small area of perhaps 100 square yards, enclosed with a single strand of electric fencing, watched over by TWO men sitting perfectly relaxed, on stools smoking their pipes.

I gave them a cheery good morning, and asked if they had seen a solitary cow. They hadn't. "You would do better to cut off their legs," said Tweedledum, snidely. "They dis-

turb the others," said Tweedledee. Understandable, I thought, if a bit unnecessary. But I was seriously beginning to wonder what kind of outfit I was working for.

I carried on to our original base, thinking she might have had that in mind as home, so I had a look around the empty chalet and cowshed. No joy. I turned away up the track along which we had driven the animals when we were heading up to the top.



The view (the trees are after my time)

I met a man, poorly dressed, unshaven and generally rather down at heel, strolling along whistling and smoking. I stopped and asked him if he had seen a grey cow. "Ah" he said. "You must be working for Willisch. Those damn greys! You have to follow them from one metre behind! Willisch!" He threw away his cigarette end and spat. "Do you have a cigarette? He cheated me you know. He never paid me for some work that I did, you want to watch out. Willisch! You be careful".

That did worry me. I had not received any money at all so far, everything being paid, according to tradition, at the end of the season. But I couldn't believe that kind Mr. Willisch would cheat me. It turned out to be his brother. "It's all one," said my new companion, "him or his brother. It's all the same"

In return for a cigarette he offered to walk along with me and help me look for signs. He turned out to be a pretty expert tracker. He pointed out a print here, hardly more than a dint in the clay, a patch of grass by the side of the road that had been cropped, a little splash of dung there. My friend with the pretty udders had not been in a hurry. It seemed that having checked out our first base, she was heading up to the second base by the track that we had originally used when we moved the herd.

So, as we turned away uphill, my tracker friend dropped away, and after a few more miles I found the young lady peacefully munching a few hundred yards from the main herd. She had led me a chase of 7 or 8 miles. It was getting dark and M. Willisch was just bringing them in.

I had a letter a few days later to say that I had been accepted for a course at Goldsmith's College, London. I spoke to Mr Willisch and told him that I was going to pull out. He was furious. After he had calmed down he realised that he had no real option but to agree. He didn't have to pay me though, he pointed out, I had broken our agreement and our contract. Anything that he gave me was out of the goodness of his heart. Understood?

Well, I understood, and I wasn't in much of a position to say anything, so I kept quiet, hoping that the goodness of

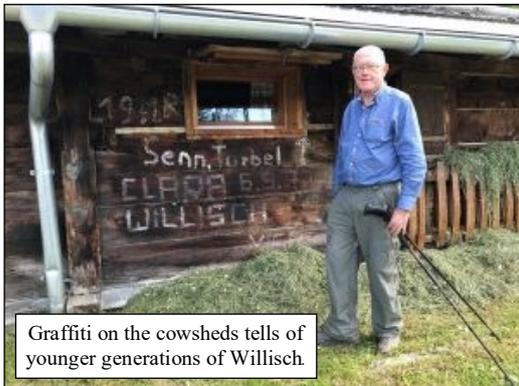
his heart was as great as it seemed to be.

He asked me to stay another week so that he could make the necessary arrangements. I was impatient to be gone, but it was fair enough. Max was angry and spiteful. Medaar, who was to take my place, was sweet and funny as always.

Not much more to tell. I went back to the farm in Sion. I presented my broad-brimmed cowboy hat to Medaar, who was delighted. I added in a carton of cigarettes to replace all the ones I had bummed off him over previous weeks. I had a really good shower and hairwash and put on my best clothes and went into the little café in Sion, where I ordered 3 decilitres of Fendant, a coffee and cake. Veronique was there. She wrinkled up her nose and said, "You smell like a cow!" but she laughed and gave me a kiss all the same.

Mrs W cooked us a lovely meal of cutlets and mash and salad. And then when the meal was cleared away, Monsieur le Patron took out a wad of notes and leafed through them mournfully. "You're losing half of it! All the bonus, and the tips from the owners... You're a fool.. ! But you work hard. You aren't the best I've seen, but I've seen many, many worse. I've a good heart!"

With that compliment he handed over a wad of notes that was considerably fatter than I had expected or even hoped for, let alone feared. It was true, he had a good heart. And so did his wife. When I went to pack my kitbag I found that she had washed, dried and neatly folded everything. And when I was leaving to walk to the station after breakfast next day after saying my goodbyes, she pressed a huge carrier bag into my hand. It was full of salami and bread and cheese and homemade cake and fruits and bars of chocolate, enough to feed a hungry man for three days. "For the train and the boat", she said with a smile.



Graffiti on the cowsheds tells of younger generations of Willisch.

FORTY+ YEARS LATER

Jenny and I went back in 2018 and, amazingly, we found the place. Three enormous ski lifts had been set up in a triangle around it, and the alpine meadows where I used to watch the beasts were now covered in shrubs and small trees, indicating that it was no longer grazed. The building where the cheese was made and the room upstairs where Max and Adolf and the boy and I and sometimes Mr. Willisch all slept was still there. It seemed to have been turned into some kind of outdoor education centre. The cowsheds were still there, and of course the view. Not that I had ever had time to stare at it, but it lifted my heart all the same every time I looked up.

James Martin

HERMON CHAPEL NEWS

DECISIONS

The time is now near the end of February 2021 and a decision has been made to relax the Covid 19 restrictions that have been in place during this third period of lockdown since the coronavirus crisis brought the country to a virtual standstill in Mar 2020. The current relaxing of restrictions has revealed a longed-for glint of joy for a normal lifestyle that had been taken for granted prior to March 2020. Even so, there have been dissenting views to this decision as to whether the time is right.



Rev Geoff Cable,
Minister of Hermon
Chapel,
Rhosgoch

During the Second World War, Prime Minister Winston Churchill had many decisions to take guiding the direction of the war, with which some members of the coalition government disagreed. They wanted to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the war. Churchill, however, kept to his decisions, and we know the rest is history.

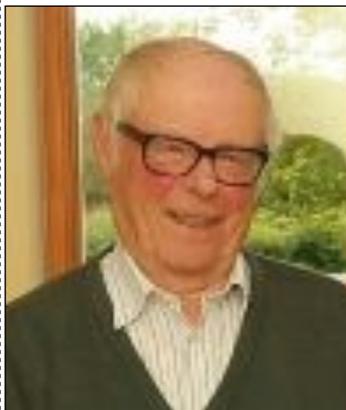
In the Bible, we read of the disputes between the Jews who followed and lived by the ancient laws of Abraham and Moses. These laws were given by God for the then Israelite nation and their lifestyles. In the New Testament, when Jesus Christ ministered in word and miracles, many Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) turned to follow him, though some still attended the synagogue and practised the traditional rituals.

The ministry of Christ, his words, his miracles, his love and compassion, strengthened his followers. The original twelve disciples, who were Jews, included fishermen, who were encouraged when Jesus told them they would be, "...fishers of men..." What if in those ancient days, in the early Christian times, those early followers of Jesus had decided that they could not abandon their ancient culture and traditions? Many suffered as a result of the decision they made.

The apostle Paul was originally a persecutor of those following Christ until his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road. Following that meeting, his decision to follow Christ brought him much suffering throughout his missionary lifestyle.

If we decide to trust in God, through Christ Jesus, we become as Peter describes us: "...a chosen people... God's special possession, to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light..." (1 Peter 2: 9). IT IS A DECISION WORTH MAKING.

Chapel News
John Meredith



A stalwart of the Chapel, John Meredith, passed away recently. His joyous love of music, coupled with his singing, gave the Chapel a reputation for the pleasure of worship. Though he retired from playing late last year, we had hoped to share his warmth for a long time to come. But he has gone to the great resting place to be reunited with Joan and all our blessings go with him.

Services

We hope to start worship again soon, depending on the regulations and the safety of our congregation. Please watch the notice board.

Mike Head, Deacon Hermon Chapel

K.J.S CARPENTRY

Structural carcassing
1st fix carpentry work
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RHOSGOCH AND PAINSCASTLE TOTS GROUP

The last time our wonderful little ones met up for Toddler Group was Tuesday 10th March 2020 and now, a year on and with hope on the horizon, here are some fabulous pictures of some of the things our special bunch have been up to over the past few months. From pancakes and painting and posing; to home schooling, daily miles, and of course, lots of gorgeous smiles.

With Easter coming up, below are some simple ideas of how to sing along whilst you get your cook on, and also get crafty with your little people.

Until the day we can meet up at group again: keep singing, exploring, splashing, cutting, sticking, finger licking, reading, counting, dancing and SMILING! We've got this!
Caz Phillips

See the Easter Bunny

(Sung to: Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush)

See how the bunny hops along, hops along, hops along, (children crouch and hop)

See how the bunny hops along,

On an Easter morning.

This is the way he wiggles his nose, wiggles his nose, wiggles his nose (children wiggle nose)

This is the way he wiggles his nose,

On an Easter morning.

This is the way he flops his ears, etc.

This is the way he bobs his tail, etc

