

Cymdeithas Brycheiniog a Chyfeillion yr Amgueddfa
Brecknock Society and Museum Friends
(Charity Number 518041)
Newsletter September 2019

From the Chairman, John Gibbs (01874 730747 or chair@brecknocksociety.co.uk)

‘y Gaer’ Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery and Brecon Library

I would like to thank members for the tremendous support that they have given to the Executive Council over the period since July 22, the day on which we first heard the shocking news that, without consultation, Powys County Council had taken steps to change the basis on which y Gaer would be used and operated.

The situation is changing day by day and we are hopeful of a positive outcome. I would urge members to make regular visits to the [‘News’ page](#) on our website to keep up to date. (I should mention that although the site has been completely redesigned, we have the same web address as before).

The delays and confusion over the opening of y Gaer have caused a ‘knock on’ delay with the Interpretation Project (background information for this project is described on the website). Things are now moving again but it has been necessary for us to go back to the funders, the Garfield Weston Foundation, to ask for a time extension up to end September 2020 in order to ensure that the 45 digital touch-screen displays are *in situ* as planned.

The Society’s Treasurer.

Peter Jenkins stood down as treasurer at our AGM in April. We are very grateful to him for his support and counsel over the years. In thanking him at the AGM, I mentioned, among other things, his quiet ‘can do’ approach: something that has been well illustrated by his work on a number of our special initiatives – whether this has been for the Henry Vaughan Project a few years ago or the ‘Conservation, display and Interpretation project for y Gaer more recently. I am delighted to say that Peter has agreed to continue to look after the accounts for *Brycheiniog*.

In Peter’s place we are very pleased to welcome Nick Jones. Nick is from a Welsh background and practised as a solicitor in the City of London for over thirty years before moving, in retirement, to live near Llangynidr. He has a long-standing interest in the classical world as well as in the history and archaeology of Wales.

Churches and Chapels in Wales: with special Reference to Breconshire

This will be the theme of the 25th Sir John Lloyd lecture to be given in March 2022 (i.e. in 18 months’ time) by the broadcaster Huw Edwards who has a special research interest in this field. The topic is timely as we have come to feel that we may have a useful role to play as an independent Breconshire body that is prepared to speak up for the continuing importance of our churches and chapels in terms of heritage, history, culture and community. In this connection we initiated a study day on Saturday May 11th during which we visited three contrasting places of worship in the Usk valley west of Brecon.

At the 15th Century Church of St David, Llywel we were told about a recently completed refurbishment, funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund and CADW, which has secured the fabric of the building and created a heritage area at the back of the church. Gillian Byrne, the project manager, outlined the eight-year process, which required three attempts to secure HLF funding. An active Friends group was vital to the success of the project.

The Beili Du chapel, built in 1858, at Pentrebach is now in the care of Addoldai Cymru, the Welsh Religious Buildings Trust. Tanya Jenkins of the Trust explained the significant place that this former Calvinistic Methodist chapel holds in the history of Welsh non-conformity and described how the immediate requirement for roof repairs and a new ceiling had been addressed. Future use may involve some redevelopment for a religious or tourism purpose such as “champing” (camping in chapel or ‘cysgu capel’). Progress in this respect will depend upon local ‘community champions’.

St Cattwg’s Church, Llanspyddid is Grade II but has a history dating back for 1500 years. It is going through redundancy and a feasibility study is being undertaken to determine whether it can find a new purpose as a venue for community events, retaining the chancel as a place for worship while opening up the nave as a multi-use space.

At the conclusion of the excursion, Mervyn Bramley contrasted the very different circumstances at each of the three places visited, each requiring sensitive and appropriate solutions balancing heritage, community and environmental elements to generate funding and to meet the needs of the building itself and of its community.

The Sister Bonaventure Kelleher Theatre Studentship .

Sister Bonaventure is a past President of the Society who taught English at the Ursuline convent in Brecon from 1949 until it closed in 1993. Over many years, she built up a reputation for her research demonstrating the importance of Brecon in the history of the theatre in Britain, a theme on which she has published two articles in *Brycheiniog*. However, she is now 96 and it has become clear that she will not be able to see the rest of her work through to completion.

During the last few months, thanks to Ken Jones, Peter Jenkins and Diana Altmeyer, we have been able to ensure that Sister Bonaventure's archive is safeguarded. We have also pursued the idea of a studentship to take forward her research under the supervision of Dr Catherine Hindson, Reader in Theatre History at the University of Bristol. An important development has been an offer of financial support to the value of one third of the cost of the project from the Ursuline order itself. We will commit some of our own funds, in recognition and appreciation of Sister Bonaventure's work on behalf of the Society, and will make application to some charitable trusts with an interest in this field of study. We also hope to approach the many people in and around Brecon who have a great affection for, and often, a debt of gratitude to Sister Bonaventure.

Art in Breconshire Group.

At the AGM in April we accepted the proposal for the formation of an 'Art in Breconshire Group'; the meetings to be open to all members of the Society. The first event organised by the Group was held in Tretower Village Hall on the early evening of June 5th. Clive Hicks Jenkins gave an illustrated talk describing the importance of his time as a CADW custodian at the Court for the development of his career as an artist. Afterwards there was an opportunity for people to walk around the site and through the Castle farm outbuildings.

Book Launch on October 16th The next Art in Breconshire event will be the launch of Shirley Jones' new book "Mezzotint and the Artist's Book - A Forty Year Journey" . Beautifully produced and illustrated, the book is a record of Shirley's artistic creativity as printmaker, etcher, poet, letterpress printer and founder of the Red Hen Press. It will be on show at the event which will be held in The Muse, Glamorgan St, Brecon at 4 pm.

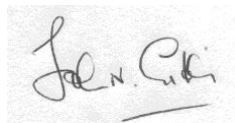
Adelina Patti Commemoration

Adelina Patti (born Feb 19, 1843, Madrid; died Sept 27, 1919, Craig-y-Nos Castle, Breconshire) was one of the greatest sopranos in history. The special committee that has put together the very varied commemorative programme is to be congratulated on its dedication, imagination and flair.

The commemorations begin with a concert on Saturday Sept 14th in the renamed Adelina Patti Theatre in the Guildhall Brecon. It will feature the famous Welsh soprano Elin Manahan Thomas (some tickets still available). They will end with events over the weekend of Sept 27th/28th at Craig-y-nos. A coloured brochure has been produced as well as a number of posters and these should be consulted for details. A late draft of the programme for the special day at Theatr Brycheiniog is attached. For this event tickets are free but should be booked.

Friday November 1st at 7 pm - An evening with Ailbhe Darcy, winner of the 2019 Roland Mathias Prize

Over the years we have enjoyed some splendid evenings with the winner of the poetry prize and we are delighted that our president Glyn Mathias has been able to arrange for Ailbhe Darcy to come to the Muse in Brecon. A flier accompanies this Newsletter. You are reminded that this is the last of these prizes and that on Tuesday February 18th 2020 Glyn and others will be reflecting upon the theme 'Roland Mathias: his life, his poetry and the prize'.



John Gibbs

Website: www.brecknocksociety.co.uk