

SECTION 7:

“Oh What A Night! ”: The Social Scene



Being a member of the GMC is a bit like being a pre 1960s debutante: a seasonal whirl of parties awaits... some even involve (gulp!) potential fancy dress... And Chris Ramsden appeared on a Clwyds meet one time with his dog, tellingly called “Mojito”... If this all sounds very non-serious most of our regular social events are also attached to walking and climbing weekend meets.

This section will look at the social scene, and also the wider picture of communication in the Club which is an area of significant development and change in our period.

We meet regularly on a Tuesday night in our own room at Gallagher’s Traditional Pub near Woodside Ferry in Birkenhead. There we do “official business” communicating news about meets and other topics, but as throughout the Club’s history this night is a chance to plan trips, swap experiences and enjoy a relaxing drink or two! The central location is good because at that time of night there’s plenty of parking for those coming by car, and also good public transport links if two drinks are going to turn into three.

Gallaghers is successor to two previous venues nearby in this century: the Crown where we were at first and then the Stork which we left in the latter part of 2018. The Crown was a good base but the room was cramped at times as our numbers grew; the beer initially was very good. At some stage in the early part of our period the pub caught “brewery disease” and appeared to be being run down with a view to redevelopment. We moved on the advice of beer aficionados to the Stork Hotel, which proved a very welcoming pub with a decent sized room, and an amazing heritage of Edwardian fittings and stained glass, a miniature version of Liverpool’s Philharmonic Dining Rooms. This was a happy and successful venue for us until our hosts John and Diane decided to leave, things changed with a new business model at the pub, and we found a new place to meet at Gallaghers.



Time moves on and it’s encouraging to see some positive recent reviews of the Stork online, as it would be good to see such a beautiful and distinctive pub prosper. Similarly, we left the Crown a long time back now and there have been positive online reviews of the pub in subsequent years.

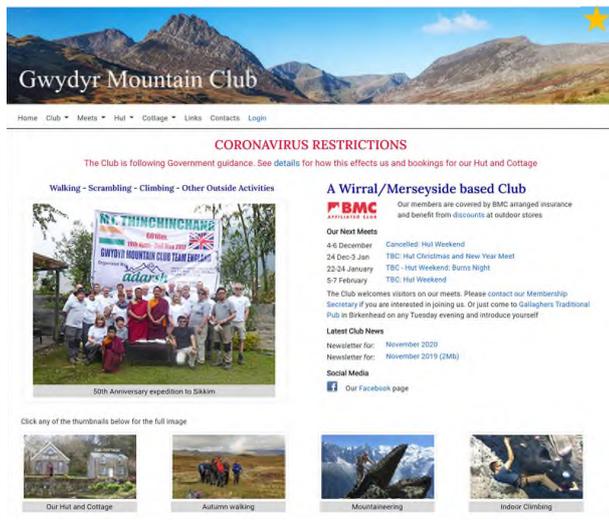
Starting at the Stork and now continuing at Gallaghers we’ve enhanced our Tuesday meetings with an occasional series of illustrated talks by members, organised by Gail Smith. This started off in the winter of 2014 and we’ve sustained it ever since. Topics are varied and have ranged widely including trekking in Nepal, how to avoid injury in mountain walking and running, and how to get some outdoor interest into European city breaks.

The most striking change in terms of communications has been the growth of the internet and how useful it has been for us. I know I find it hard to remember what it was like beforehand, and to remember just when things happened. Delving back into the records there is some evidence of when changes occurred...

Marvellously, “The Gwydyr 17” magazine of Spring 2001 had a “News in Brief” section where four members’ new email addresses were the hottest thing in town. “Les Fowles is now on email...So is Millie Wright”. The entry does indicate though that at that time enough members were already on line to have email addresses printed on the membership list! Now email is of course an everyday thing, and the running of the Club has been updated to allow e-mail as well as postal voting at AGMs etc.

Like every other organisation the need grew to develop a website and Richard Kinsman became our first webmaster. His role is mentioned in “The Gwydyr 21” magazine in Spring 2004 so our first site, created by Richard, must have been operating then. A year later the magazine gave the website address so members must have been logging on! After a few years Richard handed over as webmaster to Adrian Dolan, who made improvements to the site.

Richard’s site had served us well but with time needed an upgrade, and the December 2014 newsletter let members know that a new site had been developed. This was created by David Lane-Joynt our third webmaster, and has been



The Club website as at December 2020

improved since that time by him. It provides information about the Club and the meets programme, and also about the Hut and Cottage facilities and availability. It has become the main way for prospective members from the general public to find out about the Club, and with word of mouth is our richest source of new people. There is a separate members’ area with a member’s contact directory and other members only information.

It’s probably fair to say that the growth of email has made the Club Secretary’s job much busier, certainly than when I did it in the early ‘80s and typed up minutes on my Mum’s old manual typewriter! The website has made some aspects of the jobs of the Cottage and Hut Lettings Secretaries a little easier than in manual days.

We also have a Facebook site, introduced in 2013, that is managed and monitored by Brenda Turnbull with help from Gail Smith. We took the decision that the website is our main portal to the outside world, so the public side of the Facebook site is relatively static in nature and is designed give a good idea of who we are and to feed new people into the website. The private area of the site works like a normal Facebook group.

Here’s a bit more on the social events that are centred on the Hut, and in very general terms they involve a normal Hut meet with a big “do” on the Saturday evening. This format allows us stay over and have a few drinks, and stay “safe and legal”. Two events have a long tradition, two are newer coming into being in this century.

First up is the Annual Dinner, the only slightly formal event of the year, in that dress is generally smart. Ranging for the men from me in a linen jacket as the Bolivian Consul, through lounge suits to Black Tie; and most spectacularly for a surprising number to full Highland dress. It can be a bit of a race for the keener hillgoers to get themselves presentable in time! We even have two very short toasts, to the Club and to Absent Friends. This latter has been done by Roger Hughes since time immemorial by popular demand: Roger pays well too and so I won’t mention Blodwen (either the sheep or the human one) in print...

Since 1975 our Capel Curig local the Tyn y Coed has done the dinner for us, with a couple of exceptions, as a sit down meal. You can’t please all the people all the time but as a veteran of a lot of expensive corporate meals for big numbers, I think the Tyn y does a good meal for us, and we have our own private bar. Members and guests stay in the hotel, local B&Bs and of course the Hut. Before they turn in, their energies can get absorbed by dancing the night away to either a disco, a live band, or on occasion ceilidh bands. Not all members are keen dancers – for me a great memory was us getting Neil Harris up to dance – four of us carried him to the floor one on each arm and leg.

In recent years the evening has been enlivened by the annual photo competition, slide shows, raffles and games such as the inimitable stand up bingo, which can get amazingly tense and for a game of pure chance very competitive. Dinner organisers work very hard and thanks go to them, notably in recent years Hew McDermott and Angela

Price.

In the April 2015 newsletter Pete Mann recorded that at that year's dinner:

“The highlight of the evening came when the Chairman, on behalf of members past and present, presented Les Fowles with a photobook in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the club over the last forty eight years”

Our 50th dinner was spectacular, as thanks to Sue Taylor's work we all dressed in some combination of black and gold, and were photographed by one of Sue's friends who then photoshopped the whole thing into a massive single frame that ended up on the kitchen wall of the Hut. Apparently the photographer got enamoured of some of the legs on display, so that his hand possibly slipped at times tacking the various shots together on the computer. Like the M25, some members found themselves “widened” on the end result!

Perhaps the most atmospheric of these meets is the Bonfire Party. We build a huge bonfire below the car park and have a fine meal and drinks. On nights when it's decent weather it's great to sit around the fire and chat and watch the sparks go up into the sky. In 2011 we decided to stop having fireworks (other than sparklers) at this event, partly because of cost but more because over the years the trees around the Hut have grown, and however well sited, fireworks now risk hitting them and bouncing back at us. Paul Jensen looked after the display in all my time with the Club, and with his fire brigade skills – sometimes deployed in pouring rain - our displays were both spectacular and safe.

The standard of cuisine is generally much more adventurous than the old days of burgers and sausages. And in my case on one occasion as chef a spag bol into which the handle of the gents' loo – undergoing repair – had inadvertently got plunged... Also, we've had themed Bonfire nights – in the Oct/Nov 2013 Newsletter Allan McDonald wrote...

“There was a great turnout, 35 witches, ghosts, Draculas and a cross dressing member who shall remain nameless...what goes on at a Halloween party stays at the Halloween party!!!!...and a good time was had by all. The



Halloween themed Bonfire Night, October 2013

mulled wine flowed, full of eyeballs and skulls and the chapel was transformed into a spooky crypt complete with a coffin beer chiller. Rather than the traditional barrel of beer, we opted for a selection of smaller kegs from the Peerless brewery as well as some (blood) red and white wine.

On the menu we had a blood, guts and gore based starter followed by a terrifying tagine with a RATA-touille vegetarian option and then finished off with a deadly damson crumble!

The weather was awful all day but John Austin and his team of fire builders did a great job and we had a great bonfire that lasted all evening despite torrential rain. John you are now the official GMC fire starter!”



At the March 2016 Dinner

Inflatable Scotsmen aye puts me in mind o'Burns Night. This meet is a regular favourite, and as far as I can tell the

first one was in January 2005 arranged and I guess cooked too by Tony Lamberton (see “The Gwydyr 21” magazine of Spring 2006). A typical burns night is described in the January 2016 newsletter:

“...a great success. Sadly Anna had a bad back and had to hand over to the “Z” team of Geoff [Brierley], Kevin [Mc Evoy] and David [Lane -Joynt] to look after the catering...

During the day most people got out for a walk, although it got very damp towards the end.



The “Catering Z Team” – Kev, David, Geoff



Jon Murphy plays Burns Night 2011

In the evening we were treated to a ‘gourmet’ meal of Kev’s special mushroom soup, haggis, neaps and tatties with whisky sauce by DLJ and raspberry cranachan by Geoff, together with a selection of malt whiskies. We were entertained by various poems and songs... It was also very nice to see various people who only get out [to the Hut] occasionally, with Brenda Turnbull, and also Jenny Davies with guest Stuart there.”

The poems are of course largely Robbie’s, and whoever is, being a real Scot, or is deemed to be “most”

Scottish, addresses the haggis. I don’t think we’ve ever had to dip below the “I had a Scots great grandparent level”!

The other newish Hut based meet with a big meal is St George’s Day night which was devised as a way of balancing Burns Night and more importantly as another good excuse – no a reason! – for a meet and to have a party too. As far as I can work out our first was in April 2012. Its format owes a lot to the Scots original and it’s a great do, despite the lighter weight of the tradition.



Burn’s Night, Day Walk: 2012 on Bwlch Main, Snowdon, Bethan Hines leads

I reckon the best St George’s Day poem or verse at least is Henry V’s pre-Agincourt speech. And English songs are as good as Scots and Irish, even though you have to hang on to your ear with one hand when you sing them...



The 2016 St George’s Night Party

Over the years the Hut has also been a venue for more ad hoc parties, again usually with a number of us walking or climbing at the price of washing up later.

We’ve had Pink Panther parties, birthday parties “big” and small, Australian themed parties and more. Sometimes backed up with the talented guitar and singing of Jon Murphy.

Two from the last couple of years stick in my mind. Kev’s surprise 60th, where the surprise held right up to when he arrived, when we were blessed with good weather and our own Pizza van. And Richard Smith’s wine tasting, where

we sampled a selection of fine wines and cheeses he’d sourced from a specialist shop in Llanrwst.

The one actual purely social event of the year is the Christmas Meal, and this takes place on the Wirral. These go back into the mists of time and were once, if my memory’s right, called hot pot suppers and were what it says on



Christmas Meal at Peerless Brewery 2011 Carol Boothroyd, John Driver, Carole Roberts

the packet.

John's book shows them shifting venue pretty rapidly, and that has been the pattern in our period too, though the Villa Jazz in Oxton did have a four year run of success up to December 2004. We had a number of evenings too at the Peerless brewery, which was tops for beer and also for that kind of happening, loft like space feel. We got a good tour of the brewing process too. Sadly, it was just a bit too cold for the time of year to be comfortable. A short-lived venue was the Scouse House, which was great if it's scouse that floats your boat.

Latterly we seemed to have settled on Hoylake as our field of operations and that makes a lot of sense, given that it has a range of choice and is easily accessed by public transport. We've had a couple of decent meals at the Green Lodge and the 2019 event was held at The Grange.

These are pleasant evenings and are also often a chance to catch up with a few members who are Wirral based, who support the Club but for whatever reason don't make it to meets, as well as former members who come along. I couldn't make the 2019 do but in previous years it was great to meet up with Vikki Melbourne, Don McIntosh and former member Mike Davies all of whom were very active in my earlier days.

Where will the social scene go in the roaring '20s? Speakeasies? We've done that with a gangster and molls themed Bonfire party! What about a St David's or St Patrick's or St Piran's or St Maughold's or St Bernard's or St Nicholas' night party?

[Author's note - the last four are patron saints of Cornwall, Isle of Man, mountaineering, and Liverpool respectively. For the last, the Scouse House would be presumably a must!]

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