



A big day for Llanfyllin – and for Wales

The opening of Wales's first workhouse museum on 14th May was an important day for the conservation of history and heritage in the principality.

A crowded courtyard heard Ted Sangster of the Heritage Lottery Fund's Committee for Wales, stress the strength of the competition for heritage funding nation-wide: he pointed to the impressive turnout as evidence of the support our project had generated. And Trevor Fishlock, who devoted a full programme in his 'Fishlock's Wales' series to Y Dolydd, warmly congratulated the Trust on its achievements and the progress made since he came to film us three years ago.



Trevor Fishlock unveils the new sign.



For too long heritage attractions told only the story of the rich and powerful and overlooked the lives of ordinary people. In recent years life the balance has begun to shift. But Wales has had nothing to compare with the National Trust's well known Workhouse at Southwell or workhouse museums like Ripon, Gressenhall or Derry.



As a building the Llanfyllin Union Workhouse could claim to be more characteristic than any of these. It's true that the interior has undergone many changes. But as the National Trust has found, it's hard to make a succession of re-created workhouse wards look exciting and get them to tell a story. At Llanfyllin we couldn't afford to reinstate the bigger rooms, which have to earn their keep in other ways. Instead we opted for a virtual tour: we would build our displays around a film that would show the building as it was and bring it back to life by introducing some of the people who were there. Thus 'Ghosts of the Workhouse' was conceived.



Conceived - but the film would never have been born without the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund. Actually two films, because the HLF rightly require the Welsh language to have parity with English. Out of the £39,900 granted to us by the HLF they've cost less than £3,000 each: a very small sum for two 30-minute dramatised documentaries made to full professional standards. It's only been made possible by combining amateur talent with professional expertise. Director Grace Goulding melded the efforts of a superb volunteer cast and a novice producer and scriptwriter into a moving and convincing drama, whilst Phil Lane of our own Beehouse Studios used all his photographic, musical and editing skills to create a piece of cinema which, as several people have said, sends tingles down the spine.



It's hard to believe that the actors live down the road. Tom Morris who holds everything together with his stern yet sensitive performance in the leading role; Beth Macdonald who's so moving and Jessie Vaughan who's so passionate; young Meg Brown, Emma Lincoln and Ellis Macdonald who show such maturity; Kit Carter with his formidable presence and Steve Winder who knows how communicate without speaking a word. In its format and in the complexity of the issues it raises 'Ghosts / Ysbrydion' is more ambitious than most of the films produced for heritage attractions: if it succeeds, it's mostly down to them.



Stills by Philip Lane, Beehouse Films



The films are just one part of a complex project. The derelict spaces by the entrance have become an attractive reception area, with early features carefully restored. Bilingual panels, rich in images, show how the New Poor Law of 1834 sought to cut the cost of welfare and reduce dependency: issues familiar today. Other displays focus on workhouse life for adults, children and vagrants and on the wider Llanfyllin Union which extended from the Tanat to the Banwy. Further interpretation takes us into the twentieth century and features people who lived or worked at Y Dolydd: from the Dartmoor Shepherd to Captain Tom Astley, Ryan Davies, Glyn Roberts and Mr and Mrs John Bowen. To find out more visitors can leaf through folders of historical documents from Powys or The National Archives.

Ugly gaps in the wall and roof facing the courtyard have been filled using reclaimed stone and slate, with a new window matching those nearby. Crumbling quoins and lintels have been rebuilt. The collapsed ceiling has been

replaced with new lime plaster. The original quarry tiles have been beautifully re-laid. An inaccessible void has become a modern study room and office, providing three work stations with digital resources for students as well as facilities for our own administration. There's a comfortable viewing room where a dozen or more people can watch the films at the touch of a button. Local carpenter Andy Dunn has built two Victorian-style desks to house the document folders. Other furnishings, mostly bought on ebay, create a period atmosphere. Electrics and an integrated fire alarm have been installed. By the gate is a smart new sign. And there's more to come: oral history recordings; information on medical care and bastardy; facilities for people to upload material onto People's Collection Wales. Not to mention the High School's production of 'Oliver!'



How has £39,000 been stretched to cover all of this? Firstly by taking a fresh approach to the building work. After we'd obtained quotes from three contractors the Trust's architect Richard Payne offered to manage and carry out the project himself at a more affordable price. Working with John Davies he has completed the job on time and on budget, and the standard of craftsmanship has been impressive. Visitors to the Centre can admire it for themselves.

Secondly, by exploiting the skills of our own volunteers. John Hainsworth has been able to compile and lay out most of the displays with the help of Martin Davies

Volunteers tidying the area below the new wall and window.

and other members of the Dolydd History Group and advice from museum consultant John Marjoram and local designers Dave Goodman and Tony Wainwright. Volunteers, with some assistance from Powys Youth Justice Service, also carried out all the painting and decorating in the reception and viewing rooms as well as outside work. Phil Lane gave generously of his time to devise and install a playback system for the film at a fraction of the cost charged by museum contractors and has been advising and training our oral historians in recording and editing techniques.



The Trust has contributed £1,000 from funds previously raised and gratefully acknowledges donations of £749 from the Montgomery District Trust Fund and £150 from the Bodfach Trust.

If you haven't yet seen the film or the displays, call in as soon as you can: they're on view every day between 10.00 and 5.00 (4.00 in winter). You'll be in good company. Enquiries are coming in from schools and local groups. Ten thousand copies of a tourist leaflet, printed and distributed thanks to the HLF grant, will attract more visitors to Y Dolydd and to Llanfyllin: much needed improvements to the website will bring more. Bunkhouse and workshop users and people coming to events on site, from horse shows to the Workhouse Party, will look in too and discover the history of Y Dolydd.

Support for heritage was one of the founding objects of the National Lottery and has survived despite the raids carried out by successive governments. Few projects can have offered better value to the punters who made it all possible.



.....And a great weekend!

It began on the Friday night with the Grande Premiere of Ysbrydion Y Wyrwys or Ghosts of the Workhouse. A capacity audience, including many from Llanfyllin Film, were greeted with a complimentary glass of fizz; the stars paraded down the red carpet; bouquets and bottles were presented and the Venue has never looked so glamorous. The films were warmly received.

The Victorian Weekend celebrating the opening of the History Centre was blessed with bright sunshine and an enthusiastic audience. There had been good coverage in the press; Martin Davies was interviewed by BBC Wales and Tom Morris filmed by BBC Cymru.



Meg Brown and Jessie Vaughan



Beth and Ellis Macdonald



John Hainsworth, Tom Morris and Grace Goulding



Trevor Fishlock speaks: Ted Sangster looks on.

were the Victorian garments loaned by Lorraine Williams, including a beautiful wedding dress and the tools contributed by Mr Cannon of Bwlch. Bob was showing some of his latest wood engravings including a new version of 'Swifts' and a beautiful image of last autumn's apple pressing: both will be available as cards.

At three Trevor delivered a lecture in the Venue on the Life and Legacy of the Davies sisters, the subject of his latest book. A master of words, he held his audience in thrall without any need for Powerpoint. Then the two films were shown on the big screen.

Sunday was billed as a family day and Arts Connection arranged for Sally Duckers to provide Victorian arts and craft activities for children. The venue was filled with craft stalls. Steve and Oscar had their colourful caravans and wagons on view in the girls' courtyard, Martin Rich opened up his model railway and there were other workshops to visit. The morning was quiet but the afternoon made up for it, with a good audience to enjoy the versatile young musicians Teulu and the exciting performance by Welsh folk dancers Dawnsywyr Tanat, who practise at the Old New Inn. Debbie, Jean and their helpers in the kitchen sold out on both days and whilst the event was never intended to be a fund-raiser the Trust's bank balance was higher by the end. All in all – a weekend to remember.



Above: Oscar's caravan.
Below: The Weekend Museum.



Many people had travelled long distances to join local friends and supporters and hear our Chairman Gordon Jones begin proceedings with a brief overview of the Trust's work since 2001. This wasn't one big, daunting scheme, he said, but a series of achievable community projects of which the History Centre was one example. The Mayor of Llanfyllin, Anne Williams, told us how pleased she was that Y Dolydd, where she had worked in its last days, was coming back to life. After speeches from HLF's Ted Sangster and from Trevor Fishlock the audience followed Trevor across the car park to watch him unveil the handsome sign built by Andy Dunn and designed (pro bono) by Dave Goodman.

Trevor cut a ribbon across the doorway and the crowd poured through. And there was plenty more to see: the outstanding exhibition of photographs of old Llanfyllin, the fruits of a lifetime's collecting by Pauline Page-Jones and Richard Kretchmer, and upstairs the Weekend Museum, skilfully set out by Bob Guy and Iris Gordijn, with a weird and wonderful collection of objects: especially admired



Dawnsywyr Tanat.



Teulu: clog dancing

Stewards needed

Can you help out at the new Workhouse History Centre?

The Dolydd History group are looking for volunteers to man the Centre for half a day, once every month or every two months, at weekends or peak holiday periods.

The Centre is designed to be accessible to visitors every day, without a permanent presence. But at popular times it would be good to have someone in attendance to chat to people and find out what they think of the displays and facilities. A comfortable study room will be available to sit (or work) in between visitors. Some training can be provided.

Anyone who would like to find out more is welcome to contact John Hainsworth on john@rhiwarth.fsnet.co.uk or 01691 860549.



I'm sitting in the garden on a beautiful bright sunny morning trying to remember what we were doing in January. The months have flown by and now, on a morning such as this, those dark cold days seem a dim and distant memory. Personally, I've been undergoing one of the most dramatic metamorphoses imaginable... becoming a mum. Our daughter, Mair Enfys, is now 6 months old and growing like a mushroom. I can only marvel at the miracle that is sharing in the growth of a new life and I feel blessed to have her dozing happily beside me. She is a dream who is proving to be a contented happy little soul who has accompanied me on many Green Hub adventures already.

Since she arrived we've been on a **forest gardening course** with the multi-talented and hugely knowledgeable Emma Maxwell from Cum Harry in Newtown. More of her in a bit. We've also been learning **hedge laying** in the Welsh style under the expert guidance of Al Housman. We've had several volunteer days here at Y Dolydd Llanfyllin Workhouse to maintain the building and grounds. Work to date has included **pruning our willow hedge and mulching the new hedgerow** that Green Hub volunteers helped to plant last

autumn. We've also been busy in our gardens and have started work to **renovate our Memorial Garden**. This was the first garden we created as part of our permaculture work way back when the Trust took ownership of Y Dolydd and has served us well but is now looking a little tired and shabby around the edges (aren't we all!). So our plan is to rejuvenate it into a sensory garden that can be enjoyed by the whole community, dedicated to the memory of all those who have lived and worked here and in particular Andy Lee, the inspiration behind and founder of the Green Hub. Our volunteers have also been busy tidying up the gardens around our **newly opened History Centre**, which is now open daily and well worth a visit to learn more about this unique and precious part of our heritage that all of our toil is ultimately about. If you'd like to join us we have volunteer days coming up on the 4th and 18th June. We start at 10am but come along when you can for as long as you can. All and any help very much appreciated!

I'm particularly excited about our **Organic Gardening course** that started back in Feb in partnership with the WEA. Students are attending weekly sessions with horticulturist and tutor Emma Maxwell and using the community growing space here on site to learn the skills of growing food as nature intended, without chemical intervention. The food we grow will be used in our kitchens during our events this summer and now the garden has been brought into use will hopefully continue to do so, with a little help from our volunteers! We're now planning more courses for summer and autumn 2016. There will be a monthly **'what to do in the garden this month'** session with Emma in July, August and September and then from September Emma will again be offering 2 new courses: **'garden design'** and **'general gardening'**. For more information and to register your interest contact me on 07534354082 or join our Llanfyllin Green Hub Facebook group.

Other dates for your diary include our **BioBlitz** over the August Bank Holiday Weekend when we will again be gathering as much ecology information about the site as possible and also our **Apple Day** on 16th October, where you can bring apples along to press and take juice home. We're also hoping to be hosting a summer art club over the school holidays so keep an eye out for our posters. I can't end without sharing the best news of all. Our beloved swifts are back, bringing the courtyard and grounds to life again with their calls and playful ducking and diving overhead. I didn't realise something was missing until I heard them again and suddenly this place wakes up and feels complete. If you want to see them, or visit our history centre, join us on a volunteer day or course or simply enjoy the gardens you are very welcome. Mair and I will look forward to seeing you here sometime soon.

Also coming up this summer...

- 25 June, 23 July, 3 Sept, 24 Sept, 22 Oct: Cain Valley Horse and Pony Show.
- 8 - 10 July The Workhouse Party - our biggest fund raiser of the year. A family-friendly festival of music, arts and crafts. See www.the-workhouse.org for details. (Shhhhh! If you're local and would like to find out what it's really like, there's free entry for Llanfyllin people on the Sunday!)
- 12-14 Aug Phoenix Alternative Festival. A Steampunk event with an awesome and eclectic mix of performers from around the globe. Held in aid of the Trust and Macmillan Cancer Support.
- 25 Sept Open Doors, in association with Cadw

See separate notice for the Trust's Annual General Meeting.



The Pilgrim Trust

