

Newsletter Summer 2021

Opening up...

On the last weekend in May Y Dolydd opened its doors for our first event in over a year.



Crefft Cymru Y Dolydd was devised by our new Trustee Dan Llywelyn Hall. It brought together craftspeople and artists from along the Welsh border, all eager to display their products after months of lockdown. More than thirty had booked space. The standard was high and the range exceptional, indicating the breadth of talent at work in Shropshire and Mid-Wales. As our photos show much care and imagination had gone into the Displays, encouraging visitors to linger and to spend.



asked to wear a mask. Zarena served simple refreshments to be eaten in the courtyards - thank you to Bridget for the baking potatoes!

There were many compliments about the appearance of the site: the result of hours of voluntary labour from Jean, Mick, Gareth, Richard and others. The atmosphere was relaxed, helped by the glorious sunshine, and Y Dolydd felt busy but never crowded. More than 200 cars were counted, each contributing £3 to Trust funds, and many locals walked from the town. Stallholders paid a modest fee and seemed well satisfied with their sales. The event showed again how well suited the Dolydd site is for markets and similar events and we'd like to attract more. We hope Crefft Cymru will become a regular feature of the calendar: the next may be held on October.



For more photographs see the back page.



Another opening

A further opening will take place on Saturday 14 August when we celebrate completion of the first stage of the Master's House restoration. Keith Snell has been forced to stand down due to illness, but our good friend Dr Paul Carter from The National Archives, Kew, has kindly stepped in and will perform the opening ceremony. Paul is a leading authority on poor law history and has been a key figure in furthering recent research: he trained our own volunteers in cataloguing skills. He will give a talk during the day.



Before the ceremony we plan to launch our book: 'Masters and Matrons of the Llanfyllin Union Workhouse' and copies will be on sale. The building will be on view from 10.00.

The fine octagonal room on the first floor will be on view along with the renovated Master's stairs. There will be displays on the restoration and on the Workhouse architect, Thomas Penson as well as an exhibition in the gallery. John Browne will play his harp once again and if its members feel ready the Penybontfawr Male Voice Choir will perform in the courtyard. Some studios will be open. Lunch will be available.

This is an opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the restoration: individual donors, sponsors and supersponsors as well as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Pilgrim Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Foyle Foundation, Cadw, Powys and other funders who primed the pump or helped when money was running short. Their support will be suitably acknowledged.

Thank you to the AHF

External work on the Master's House, along with the top floor and stairs leading to it, made up the first phase of the project. Now, thanks to a new grant of £40,000 from the Architectural Heritage Fund, we can go on to renovate



the first floor rooms and replace the missing floor in the adjoining Gallery. You can read more about this inside. Gareth and others have worked hard to clear the spaces in readiness.

The grant is from money provided by Cadw, to be spent in Wales. The AHF gave us a loan to fund the original purchase in 2004: we're grateful for their continued support.



Master's House: Phase Two



As we go to press the new boards in the top floor room are receiving their coats of oil. Neil Smith has fitted a surround to the grate we acquired and the room has a focal point. Hand-moulded skirtings are in place and we're waiting for second fix electrics. 'Period' fire doors have been identified. The stairs and landing are ready for painting.

The generous award from the Architectural Heritage Fund means that we can make a start on Phase Two. We accepted a quote from Neil to repair the lower flight of stairs to the ground floor, and the approach to the restored areas is already much improved. Neil is also restoring the wider stairs on the other side that once led to the Chapel.

Later in the summer work can start on the two first floor rooms. Luckily the vandals or thieves who had begun removing floorboards in the 1990s had stopped after taking around a quarter: those gaps need to be filled. The lime plaster ceilings are decayed in places but we're hoping they too can be patched and not replaced completely. We have consent to remove part of the dividing partition but plan to leave this in place at least for now, creating a further display space and a room to serve as an office and a base for the Trust's activities.



The next step will be to replace the missing section of floor above the present Gallery, (seen here in 2008) which we dismantled to eliminate extensive dry rot. This will re-create a through route on the first floor leading

into the Master's House and provide an attractive, well-lit space.

If funds can be stretched enough we may be able to open up the blocked doorway into the Master's House to create the new main entrance as projected. The lift and toilets may have to wait a while.

Introducing a new tenant...

We now have 19 tenanted workshops or studios. They provide a valuable base for local enterprises and the income from them covers most of our regular outgoings. Our tenants are a vital part of the Dolydd community. Charity Commission rules require us to seek professional advice on rentals and last year we retained Celt Rowlands to provide a survey and report. They thought our rents were broadly fair but their report has recommended some modest increases: the first for several years.

Unit 5 in the Women's Yard has been taken by an architect, Rebecca Richardson. Rebecca writes:



I am very pleased to be creating an office space at The Workhouse. My small architecture and design practice has been steadily growing over the last few years, and I enjoy taking on all kinds of projects. I wanted a space away from my home based office that would give me room to display work, product samples, and meet clients. I love designing low energy 'eco' homes, with a focus on contemporary Welsh / Scandi style, making use of timber cladding, natural stone, and shapes and forms that we would traditionally see in the landscape.

I think The Workhouse offers a fantastic space to get inspired and feel simultaneously at home and at work!

You can see some of my work on www.rrarchitecture.co.uk and instagram [rra_design](https://www.instagram.com/rra_design). My work has featured in the Welsh Architects Journal "touchstone"; channel 4 "building the dream"; the national Homebuild and Renovation Magazine; and been nominated for LABC low energy and good design awards. I also work closely with local builders and timber frame manufacturers, as well as looking for opportunities to work with developers seeking interesting and sustainable options to develop, design and build.. If you would like to meet me, please get in touch to meet by appointment.

... and two more

Ewe and Ply are also new tenants. We're already grateful to Becca and Teri who made big improvements to the herb garden before their unit was ready to move into. They introduce themselves below. The photo shows Shropshire Ply's stall at Crefft Cymru.



The Ewe and Ply team, comprising Becca Tansley and Teri Evans, have decades of textile knowledge and experience and use this in the development of their own yarn. Shropshire Ply is spun from carefully selected local fleeces and is hand-dyed in a myriad of semi-solid colours. Becca sticks to conventional acid dyes and creates a palette inspired by hedge-row flowers, whilst Teri's expertise lies with natural dyes, producing glorious shades that are often brighter than you might have expected. Taking on a unit in the workhouse means the pair can expand on previous dye runs to create a wider range of shades, as well as more adventurous variegated colourways.

To complement the hand-dyeing Becca and Teri have plans to offer workshops in their new setting and have also been working to bring the previously established medicinal herb garden back to its former glory. Teri is making use of her background in medical herbalism to get the best out of the garden, and with an eye to developing a dye garden alongside the pair have already added some dye plants. Watch this space for future home-grown dyeing.

Ewe & Ply have an established shop in Oswestry, where Shropshire Ply and a great range of other ethical yarns are available.

For information on the progress of the herb and dye garden, please see Page 4.

Recycling to fine art

Liz Neal

First came the copper roofing plate, removed during the recent restoration of the cupola on the Workhouse roof. It was suggested by the Trustees that perhaps I could find an art project to use it in. I immediately thought of copper etching plates. It would be a great opportunity to to engage with the skills I learned at the Royal College of Art. What about a press though?



The nearest open access print room with a press is in Wrexham, too far away – plus they wouldn't allow slightly irregular and bent plates to be run through their nice machines. I needed an alternative so I googled and found printing presses made from laundry mangles. I looked for people who were interested in the project and could help with a mangle conversion. I found Bob

and accomplished print masters on my doorstep.

Thanks to Bob we received a £500 grant from the Golsoncott Foundation which helped fund the conversion plus materials, paper and tools. The transformation from mangle to press was undertaken by Cec Jones and Jacek Malinowski of Apex Market Stalls, Llanfechain, who fabricated the press bed and reassembled the unit after Mark Hewlett, a local woodcarver, lathed the wooden roller down to fit inside steel tubing. It works a treat!



Despite the pandemic we were able to complete the alterations and get the printing process ready to provide the first public access etching workshop as part of Crefft Cymru Arts and Craft Fair. We were able to use the Workhouse copper to produce the first prints. Sally Duckers (left) and Jane Carrington were the first artists to make prints: they both

produced great work and were pleased with the results.



Interest has been aroused in the community and the project is ongoing. I am offering weekend courses at £65. You can book, come and learn how to etch and walk away with prints. £5 will be donated to the Workhouse charity each time to cover the cost of the copper that's been used.

Ghosts from the past?

Paranormal investigations are becoming increasingly popular at Y Dolydd and make a significant contribution to the Trust's finances. Some people are sceptical, even suspicious - but the interest is genuine and responsible groups take their researches very seriously. One is Willows Paranormal, whom we've welcomed on several occasions. Here Andy Coult and Jennifer Lowe describe their experiences.



Willows Paranormal are a Welsh based paranormal research team fronted by Jennifer Lowe, a local business owner and medium. The team come together from all walks of life but each sharing a love of the paranormal and local history.

Willows have investigated many locations such as Moreton Corbett, Drakelow tunnels and Antwerp Mansion to name but a few. These are indeed fantastic locations in their own right but nothing compares to the attachment we have with Llanfyllin Union Workhouse.

The Workhouse itself is a fantastic building reflected in the obvious passion the trustees have for it. As a team we are always made welcome and share a mutual respect for the building and its history.

So what is it that draws us to Llanfyllin time and time again? Lets face it, we always look to the Workhouse first every time we are organising our dates. The answer is simple. Buildings, we believe, pick up on the emotions and feelings of the people that have lived there. Have you ever been into a building and picked up a strange scent, or a feeling of calmness? It may be the lingering energy of a past inhabitant. Not only that but the Workhouse is one of the only places we seem to get the same results in the same part of the building every time we visit.



Due to our respect policy we do feel that it is unethical to mention names or specific people as we never know if living relatives may be aware or feel in anyway disrespected. We do pick up a little boy each time we visit the bunkhouse, he holds hands and interacts with the team on occasion and is such a pleasant little soul that we actually look forward to his interaction whenever we visit. This little chap is playful at times and never seems in any way negative to us.

We do enter the Master's chamber with a little trepidation during our visits as we often encounter quite a stern gentleman who gives us the feeling he does not like anything that does not conform to his expectations. A younger female is also picked up on that indicates she is a relative of the gentleman to us. Many guests have witnessed shadows and unexplained knocking in this area and on one or two occasions guests have experienced a sensation of being pushed.

The dining hall at the Workhouse is also one of our favourite hotspots for activity. We have witnessed light anomalies, footsteps and even the sound of children laughing in this area. A young gentleman has been known to interact with the team regularly and has indicated that he suffered from learning difficulties in his lifetime. We do get a strong sense that he recognises team members and waits for us to visit.

We also venture into the cellars and this is a particular favourite for our guests as we do get a lot of activity here but have never been able to pin it down to a particular person or energy – for us our investigation goes on.

Many people may find this hard to take in or believe: most of our team to some extent are sceptical and always looking for "the explainable answer" for many of the noises etc that we encounter. Don't take our word for it though, maybe join us on one of our investigations and experience these things for yourself. We can't guarantee activity or things that go bump in the night but we can promise you the chance to experience this amazing location in a different light.

More events



On the Wednesday morning after Crefft Cymru we were glad to host another event. Local families had a wonderful time crafting in the sunshine at a half term workshop led by artist Alwyn Wesson Caberwal. It was organised by Arts Connection – Cyswllt Celf and funded by The Arts Council of Wales.

We had to postpone the Wild Country weekend planned for June. But some of our regulars, including Band of Builders, have booked for the summer and monthly horse shows are resuming. The **Workhouse History Centre** is open again - by prior appointment only for the present to ensure social distancing - and the **Bunkhouse** is now able to take bookings.

Cadw have re-launched **Open Doors**, Wales's Heritage Open Days, and ours will be on Sunday, 12 September. Please note the date! Zarena Allan is planning a Food Fair once again and there will be a full programme of displays, open studios and live music.

Cap'n Jonathan Rich has signalled:

Aarrh! Good news indeed! After a long break away sailing the Seven Seas, the Cursed Galleon is now back in the port of Llanfyllin! Book your place today and play our highly rated pirate escape room.

<https://www.roomination.co.uk/.../escape-from-the-cursed.../>

Less fun but just as important, the **Trust's AGM** is scheduled for Monday, 16 August. Another date for your diary.

Thank you Richard

In 2008 we appointed Richard Payne as Architect to the Trust. Ever since then Richard has played a key part in the gradual restoration and development of Y Dolydd – a hugely complex project. He encouraged us when the task seemed daunting; proposed the initial clean-up of the ground floor to create the café-bar; produced both master plans and detailed schemes. Initially Richard's fees were covered by the AHF: later rewards depended on grants, not all of which materialised. Yet he willingly supplied drawings and advice.



The concept for the Master's House and the design for the restored cupola were a notable achievement. We tried Richard's patience over the years with changes of plan, and further stress came from the growing demands of bureaucracy. But he's always been in tune with our ethos: we've benefited from regular musical contributions with the Beltones: we hope they'll continue.

Richard is standing down and deserves a very big thank you. In his place we've appointed Geraint Roberts, a Specialist Conservation Architect who lives in Llanfechain. With the second phase of the Master's House, more roof repairs and new workshops needing consents, Geraint will have plenty on his plate. We're looking forward to working together.

And more from Crefft Cymru

Finding out what's in the Garden



Becca and Teri write: We thought we would give a little progress update. The herb beds are well defined which makes weeding them easier although the more rampant of herbs manage to escape our efforts. Coltsfoot is an

unusual herb as its flowers come up before the leaves, giving rise to a folk-name "son-before-father". The flowers can be used to make a pleasant tasting cough syrup that is soothing for dry tickly coughs. The leaves are good for stubborn chesty complaints and Culpepper puts it under the governance of Venus. It is having a good try at herb garden dominance and needs keeping an eye on as it spreads via underground stems which, thankfully, are easy to pull out.

Another herb running rampant is marjoram or oregano. As the two are quite happy to cross-pollinate, what we are finding everywhere could be either or both! We have decided to call the Y Dolydd variant "moregano", which covers both possibilities and takes into consideration that we keep finding more oregano! Marjoram is more likely to be killed off by frost so it is likely to be oregano. As marjoram is sweeter than oregano the truth may be in the eating.

