

Canolfan in the Community

The Newsletter of Canolfan y Fron

December 2020

Hello. The last few months have been exceptionally busy but now that there are promising Covid-19 vaccines we can see light on the horizon and our objective is to have the Canolfan ready to bounce back as soon as restrictions ease. One of our hot buttons is to improve communications with members and the community, so we will be producing **Canolfan in the Community** more regularly in future.

The Siop

If you have visited the Siop lately you will be aware that some changes are being made. The wall separating the Siop from the small office behind has been demolished. The extra space created will allow us to stock alcohol, serve takeaway hot food & drinks and provide a better check-in experience for Llety guests. The office next to the Siop has been turned into a stock room which has allowed us to carry much more stock so that the Siop will be able to provide a more reliable service to customers.

The Llety

The Llety reopened in July but could only be let to a single family group at a time because COVID-19 guidance did not permit shared facilities. In August the Welsh Government announced reopening of accommodation with shared facilities, but said that shared kitchens should continue to be let to a single family group pending further advice. That advice never came, so the decision was taken to close the shared kitchen to allow the Llety to be let to its full capacity. We are in the process of fitting kettle stations in the rooms so that guests can make tea and coffee and will also sell Breakfast Bags to guests. We will soon be changing the shared kitchen so that the route to the South Hall no longer passes through it.

The Caffi

In the last issue we reported that Yashka Jureczko had been recruited as consultant for the relaunch of the Caffi. Yashka produced some menu ideas and we held a tasting session. A Covid-19 secure counter was installed in the Caffi. As lockdown ended Yashka found herself overloaded with work from her own business and also it became clear that major work was required to eliminate serious leaks affecting the Caffi and South Hall windows. With great reluctance, the Board took the decision to defer the relaunch of the Caffi until the 2021 season. Work on this has started – watch this space!

Hall Rental

The two lockdowns plus limits on the number of people allowed to meet indoors has meant that the ability to generate income from hall rental has been very limited. The Weddings market should be by far the greatest source on income, but although there has been interest in holding weddings, changing Covid-19 advice and the second lockdown have left the weddings market largely on hold. That is not to say that the halls have been idle, there have been a few business and ramblers meetings and regular Yoga and Pilates classes have been reinstated between lockdowns.

Staff Changes

Christine Humphries and Pauline Williams resigned from their posts in September. Christine had worked in the Siop from the beginning and did a magnificent job of keeping it going through the first lockdown. Pauline was a cleaner in the school and she continued to help with the cleaning after it was transformed into the Canolfan, working right through the first lockdown. We wish both well and hope that in the future they may be able to contribute to the Canolfan once again. Anibal Sousa who used to help in the Caffi has been appointed Canolfan caretaker. We welcome Dalton Pringle and Cadi Hughes to the Canolfan family. Cadi works in the Siop and Dalton joined as a cleaner but with the Llety closed during lockdown and few bookings during the English lockdown, he has been working in the Siop as well.

The Board

There have been some changes to the Canolfan Board. Gwenda Roberts and Anwen Harman have both left, we wish them well for the future. Eiriona Williams has joined the Board as a co-opted member. John Rowlands was formally voted on to the Board at the EGM on the 17th September 2020. Mandy Hindle has stepped down as Chair but remains an active member of the Board. The Board has voted to give the Chair to John Rowlands and this will be put to members at the next General Meeting.

Volunteers

The Canolfan could not have survived the lockdown or the period without the dedicated support of its volunteers. Excluding directors, we benefitted from over 288 hours of volunteer time in October. The time and effort they give is very gratefully received and it means we can open 7 days a week. Helen, Eiriona, Alison, Bethan, Mason, Jules, Owain, Jim, Martin, Ellen, Nia and Eddie have been extremely important in helping us to offer a full service in the shop, sometimes at very short notice. Special thanks to Eddie and Nia for helping with stock checks and Mason for leaping into action to cover the till once people saw we were in there working. Christine and Pauline both did much voluntary work in addition to their paid work. Our paper collectors, Mike, Alison, Jim, Bryn and his deputy Kate, have ensured that customers and residents who can't get out can have their favourite newsprint. Alison has been working on our Health and Safety processes and planning for training with Anibal, including meeting with our H&S advisors. Gwerfyl has been distributing emails until we could organise our remote access. She is now working on our posters, notices and some Companies House admin work. If you are interested in volunteering, please leave your details in the shop and we will get back to you.

Profile of John Rowlands - Meet Mr Different!

I interviewed John Rowlands to find out more about this grey van driver. He hails from Llangefni where he was brought up in a Welsh speaking family. His father was at Anglesey Aluminium for 35 years and his mother a homemaker with an entrepreneurial side, operating a burger van for a time as well as selling home grown vegetables. The young John clearly inherited this entrepreneurial spirit, around age 7 he started collecting bottle tops for pocket money before moving on to the more lucrative business of the collecting bottles for their deposit. By age 9 he was working on a farm, initially collecting eggs but as he grew stronger he became a farm hand. There he developed his next business proposition. There were plenty of pigeons in the farm buildings; he could capture them and sell them to pigeon fanciers for up to £20. Some fanciers released their birds too early and they would fly straight back to the farm, so John sold them again!

On leaving school John trained as a diesel fitter but work was hard to come by so he signed up to the army, joining the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. After training he was posted to Münster in Germany; clearly not the most challenging of postings because his main memory of it is for a time running the bar where he introduced rolls as part of the offering. In summer 1990 Iraq invaded its neighbour Kuwait and from August the USA, Britain and other allies prepared for the Gulf War to liberate the country. John was sent out in October and moved into ordnance before taking part in the invasion of Iraq in early 1991.

In 1993 he left the army, returned to Anglesey, got married and found a security job at an abattoir. You can't keep a good entrepreneur down; soon he had turned the security work into his own business, branched out into cleaning and then into flooring. The flooring work made him so busy that he had to find someone to run the rest of the business, but it took a personal toll with his marriage failing after only 2 years. When his flooring business partner gave up, John restarted the business. He remarried and the business boomed taking him all around the UK. Just as 'what goes up must come down' every boom is followed by a bust. A downturn hit revenues, the bank called in loans and the company was wound up in administration. John was hit hard; his second marriage broke down and he developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) linked to the Gulf War.

After successful therapy, John started his own property maintenance business on Anglesey. A friend had a chimney sweeping and fireplace business, John helped out and soon fell in love with things sooty and smoky! When the friend had an accident, John took over the business. One day he was called to a job in Carmel and there he met his current wife, Jill. Anglesey man turned into Upper Llandwrog man.

So, what characteristics did I spot in John Rowlands? Clearly, he has immense patience. He enjoys going deerstalking in Scotland. Anyone who can lie still for long periods of time in wet heather and midges must have it by the gallon. There again, he is a bit of a walkover because the local otters and pheasants don't even see him lying in the heather. He is also a glutton for punishment, that is the only way to describe someone who admits to flying a microlight eight times with an engine that repeatedly cuts out.

I asked John for his vision for the Canolfan, and he said that he wanted to make it a success and make it pay. He likes a challenge and believes that in a changed world he can help the Canolfan to find a unique product base. I asked John how he would describe himself and he said "I'm Mr Different".

Mike Elsdon

Notes from the Chair

It's been a challenging year to date with the pandemic absolutely crippling the economy. Cafeterias and accommodations have closed their doors for the foreseeable future all over the world! As you will have seen on page 1 we have had to completely rethink many aspects of CyF in order to keep it afloat.

This is all being made possible thanks to a very adept team of directors at CYF who are an absolute dream to work with, I feel humbled to be allowed to lead this team. Bear in mind that every spare moment that they give to CyF is costing them time for which they are not paid, their only reward being the satisfaction of helping others.

We now have four part time paid staff who do an amazing job of running the accommodation, hall and shop. Cadi and Dalton who recently joined run the shop. Our shop volunteers Eiriona, Alison and Bethan are amazing it's a mad house at times and great fun to work with this crazy lot! Anibal Sousa is our new caretaker, he is carrying out health and safety checks on a regular basis and taking part in the remodelling of the shop and the Llety.

Jim Embrey is running the accommodation bookings, working with director Mike Elsdon who has used his knowledge of running accommodation in the area and IT skills to revamp the Llety, its pricing and the material on the booking sites. Mike has also now taken Marketing on, so watch this space!

Sandy our treasured Treasurer has been diligently working on the accounting and we now have an amazing accounting system with Sage which is being monitored by our new bookkeeper Julianne Pringle. Our past Chair Mandy is our Admin supremo and leads the Volunteer network. She also volunteers at the shop on a Saturday, types up our meeting minutes, has a full time job and takes care of her family! Steve has been an awesome recent addition to the team. Alongside running his own businesses and taking care of his family he addresses the constant IT issues and challenges from the changes at CyF.

I look after the Siop and Building Maintenance. We are planning to utilise redundant fences to fence off electrical heating system. Service engineers are booked to service heaters for the first time. We are ensuring Health and safety of visitors and staff/volunteers by direct action on fire exits and faulty equipment being replaced or removed.

One thing that I do want to do is develop our relationship with the community. You don't expect to find complete unity in a small village environment but, sadly, there have been a few who disagree fundamentally with our stance on how and what decisions are made to keep CyF afloat in these difficult times. There have even been instances where false rumours have been circulated such as one suggesting that directors were taking money from CyF. We have to accept where we are; the school is not coming back, CyF is the best chance to put the buildings to good use in the interests of the community but Covid-19 means that directors have to take difficult and occasionally unpopular decisions to keep it afloat. We need the buy-in of the community, but it is not possible to consult on the day to day running of CyF. There are some in the community who want to influence who is employed at the Canolfan based on their personal loyalties and dislikes, and even to influence employee terms and conditions. Only the Board can select the best person to do each job and, mindful of budgets, reward them according to their contribution to CyF. The views of the community are essential for the success of CyF and the Board will listen very carefully to them, but I do ask for positive suggestions about how we build CyF rather than the constant negativity of a tiny group people.

We already have some ideas to develop CyF but we would love to have ideas from the community. Some ideas being tossed around include: should we run Walking Tours from CyF, could the Caffi produce meals unique to the area, do we need a Community Area and do we need more picnic tables?

Well that's all for this month from me. I know it's taken a few weeks for me to get in touch. I hope you appreciate that the time we have is precious and we do have distractions that have to be dealt with on occasion that take us away from our main aim of building a successful thriving community centre.

John Rowlands AKA Mr Different

Statement by the Board

1. A posting that referred to slave labour was made by director Mandy Hindle on a private Canolfan WhatsApp group on the 13th October 2020.
2. A verbal complaint about the posting was received from one member of the WhatsApp group and it transpires that the posting was seen by at least one person outside of the private group and that has resulted in a claim that the it was referring to volunteer help at the Canolfan.
3. We have investigated the posting and concluded that it was intended as lighthearted banter. It was not intended be construed to apply to either staff or volunteers at the Canolfan.
4. Many people feel that slavery should not be the subject of any joke and we accept that for some it was in poor taste. We sincerely apologise for any distress caused.
5. We wish to make it clear that everyone at Canolfan y Fron condemns slavery in all of its forms.

The Canolfan Magazine – a review of events

Owain Glyndŵr Day

The anniversary of the proclamation in 1400, of Owain Glyndŵr as Prince of Wales was celebrated at the Canolfan on September 16th. Good weather meant that we could use the yard and the field for a good sized socially distanced event. £100 was raised. Many thanks to Christine for her work organising it.



Siop Talk

The enlarged Siop is coming on. The wall has been removed and here we see Anibal painting the new plaster where the wall had been removed. We couldn't see his smile so he pulled down his mask while we kept our Covid-19 distance!



Oh no, not again!

The Canolfan roof has suffered wind damage for the fourth time. We all know that it can be windy in Fron but the Canolfan is clearly in an unusually windy place. Moving to a less exposed site could be tricky so we have taken advice from roofing experts and it seems that the slates are too thin for the pressure on that side of the roof. It will cost £5,000 to reroof with thicker slates. The Board is considering ways of raising the money.



MacMillan Fundraiser

Eddie Willcox approached the Canolfan proposing that the community take part in the MacMillan annual fundraiser. A planned coffee morning had to be scrapped due to lockdown but a raffle with prizes such as free MOTs (donated by B & K Williams) raised £485. Many thanks to Eddie and the team of volunteers who made it happen.

Community Funded Defibrillator

The defibrillator has been delivered. We are awaiting the cabinet to house it and then it will be installed. Thanks to Liz Williams and previous board members for making this possible.

..... and finally

A critic of the Board recently described its members as Muppets. It was meant to be an insult, but it had little effect; just a frenzy of speculation about who should take what role. We decided that John Rowlands should be Kermit – acts as the compère and currently a bit green. Mandy wanted to be Animal so the Board are having a whip round to buy her some bright red hair dye. Mike, conscious that he is Fron's answer to Basil Fawlty, opted to be Waldorf (Series 2 Episode 3). Sandy? The Swedish Chef and finally Steve as Fozzie Bear. That leaves a key vacancy – who is Miss Piggy? Eiriona, are you really sure that you want to join the Board?