Barmouth Sailors' Institute

(Founded in 1890 by the late Canon EDWARD HUGHES B.A.)

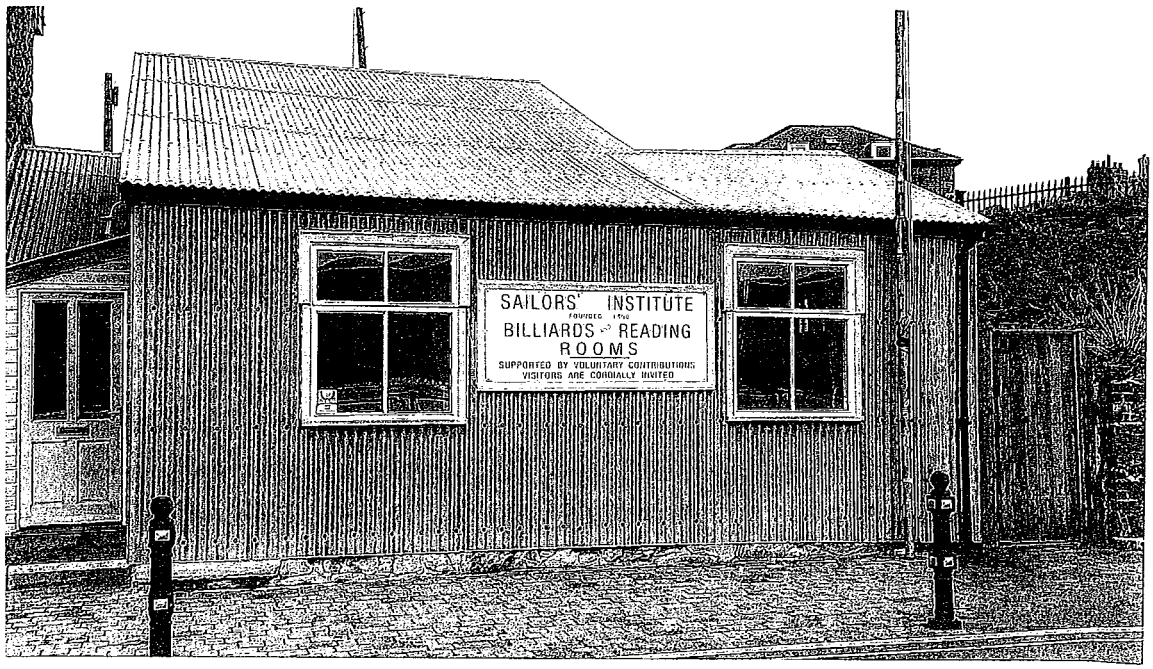
Sailors' Institute, The Quay, Barmouth, Gwynedd LL42 1ET

Registered Charity No. 1057490

NEWSLETTER ISSUE Twenty Two

(Edited & Published by Trevor Roberts)

February 2017



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Revd Cannon Beth Bailey

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Trevor Roberts

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Yes we have now reached newsletter 22 despite many trials and tribulations delaying publication, but I hope this bumper issue will make up for the delay.

Articles within the next few pages cover articles by our Secretary Janet under the title SECRETARY'S WHATNOTS and these give a very much updated version of our history over the past 18-19 years.

Our President Rev'd Canon Bethan Bailey organised a lovely service at St. David's Church to celebrate our 125th birthday and it was attended by the Mayors of Barmouth and Birmingham supported by many of our local residents.

I have also reproduced a copy of the talk Janet gave at the Church Service that covered the Sailors' Institute history from its beginning to the present day.

Norma Stockford has produced an article about our local RNLI history and this will be followed with another story in our next Newsletter.

Committee member Alan Vincent has produced a short article covering Nautical Sayings, many which I'm sure we either use or hear regularly but don't really know what the background to them is.

I have continued with the item of a profile of someone connected with our Institute and am delighted in this issue to give you Tom Hughes.

In the next few months your committee will be considering the annual membership fees that have stayed the same £5-00 for many years. We would welcome any views on this subject.

Of course I'm always looking for new articles, so any member who has a story or subject that would interest other members please send it on to myself by the end of May and hopefully we can publish it in our next newsletter.

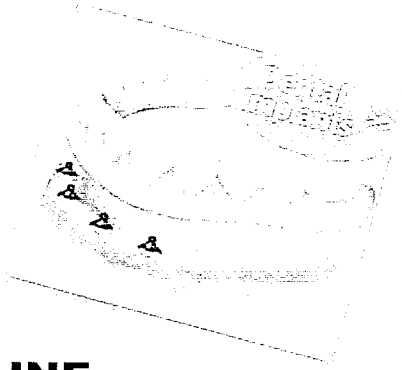
Our Treasurer Mr John Puddle is still seeking new members, so please encourage a friend or neighbour to fill in the form on the back of this newsletter and become a member, for this year it's only £5-00.

Finally my thanks on your behalf to the President, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Committee members for ALL their help in ensuring our Institute goes from strength to strength.

Trevor Roberts

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SECRETARY'S WHATNOTS

Any day now no doubt I'll be getting a telephone call or email from our illustrious Editor Trevor, wanting my piece for Newsletter number 22. Yes, 22. Quite an achievement to still be producing what we hope is an interesting piece of coffeetime reading. Unfortunately over the years we've had our ups and downs with getting issues published but, with perseverance, we've maintained a tradition which all started with my first year as Secretary. When sending out the Membership renewal notes for 1998, I thought it would be nice to tell our members how their money was spent and appreciated and our aims for the future. So I did just an A4 report on the year. In 1997 we had taken on the restoration project and needed to raise £301,000 - a vast sum in those days for a small organisation like us. It still is a large amount. Trevor came up with the idea of a Newsletter, or bulletin as he called it - I thought it was much more 'up market' and should be called a 'Newsletter'! Trevor took the helm as Editor and the first one was issued in October 1999. I've just revisited it - just two A4 sheets with me taking virtually 3 of the 8 pages! We certainly have come on since then. Our Treasurer Norman Tweedale reported an increase in membership from 90 in 1998 to 93 in 1999. We now have 200 plus.

So to 2016. It was busier than usual. In addition to our annual Coffee Morning (my thanks again to all our loyal followers - cake\bread makers, tea\coffee girls, etc. and punters for making it another success) the Institute building has been the venue for two

television projects. The first one for ITV's Coast and Country and later a promotional film for Visit Wales, Snowdonia Coastal paths and walks. The Tŷ Gwyn volunteers opened up for the Welsh Museums Festival week. Unfortunately they were not inundated with visitors but it showed a commitment to the museum world of how we treasure the maritime history Barmouth and area and what it has to give to the world. Talking of the world, I recently did a little research via our Visitors Book entries. I was filing a renewal application of our museum accreditation status and in one of the sectors I had to show user use and prove we are worthy of our status in the world of museums. I came up with the following facts, some of which I must admit intrigued me.

Countries from where visitors have visited:

Italy, France, The Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Poland, Finland, Denmark, Bratislava-Slovakia, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Rep. of Ireland, Thailand, Russia, New Zealand, Australia including: Gold Coast, Western Australia, Sydney, Melbourne, U.S.A. including Pennsylvania, Florida, Delaware, Tennessee, Georgia, Maine, Washington, Wisconsin, Oregon, Arizona , Canada including: Ontario, Newfoundland, British Columbia.

School parties include:

Llanystumdwy, Harlech, Barmouth, DyffrynArdudwy, Caerdydd, Coventry, Pwllheli, Eglington, Penrhyndeudraeth, Birmingham, Wolverhampton. There is an entry in the Visitor's Book by Phil Caldwell, Arriva Trains Wales stating that approx. **200 children** from along the Cambrian Coast have visited in just two months as part of a safety project. Wonderful place, thank you.

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Other groups include:
Barmouth 2nd, Brownies, Harlech W.I., Representation from SCYC Abersoch

Users for small meetings:
Barmouth Town Council, Arriva Trains Cymru, Cymni'rBermo, Barmouth Coastal Path, W.I., ClwbyrTraeth, and many more small organisations some of which no longer exist

Other users:
ITV Coast and Country filming, Visit Snowdonia, Barmouth promotional filming, setting for S4C programme Heno featuring Elin Fflur, CMW workshop. Photographing pictures for history books of the area

So you will see, in addition to our regular users who read the newspapers and play snooker, we are quite a busy place in our own way. This is why your membership is vital to keep the 126 year building alive and kicking. All Committee members very much appreciate your continued support and extra donations.

126 years old! I think those of you, despite the inclement weather, who attended our 125+ year celebration in St. David's Church will agree our President Rev. Canon Beth Bailey, made a lovely job of the service. Thank you Beth. Having the Harlech Silver band play for us set the scene wonderfully. The attendance of Barmouth's Mayor,Cllr. Val McArdell and Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for Gwynedd, Mr. Edmund Bailey together with the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Cllr Carl Rice also brought dignity to the event. Although the reason for Cllr. Rice's visit was due to the sad loss of the two teenagers in the

summer, it was ironic in a way,to have his presence,as we have a roundabout connection with the Midlands in that the very first bit of grant money I managed to obtain in 1998 towards our Restoration fund, came from The Piggott Trust which only donates money to the Midlands area and North Wales. The Cambrian News did us proud in covering the event with the full CQ page.

Other anniversaries of note besides ours are:

100 years Battle of the Somme

800 years Magna Carta

200 years Battle of Waterloo

100 years The sinking of Titanic's sister ship HMHS Britannic. a story perhaps for Issue 23?

100 years Ireland's Easter rising

100 years Lloyd George, Wales only Prime Minister, entered 10 Downing Street and so ends today's history lesson. I could go on!

With that I think I ought to come to a close. I hope you will enjoy the contents of this issue. I did get one reply from my requests in Issue 21 regarding the history of Coes Faen and passed it on to Mrs. Sara Parry-Jones for which she was very grateful. Unfortunately no one out there had anything relating to the Battle of the Somme. Awful to think how many thousands of lives were lost in real time since the publication of Issue 21. I had intended to continue with that story but Trevor has sufficient articles for this issue so you will just have to wait until number 23!

May I wish you all the very best for 2017, I hope you had a pleasant 2016 Festive Season, Easter and summer are just around the corner!

Janet Griffith

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Nautical Sayings

In June of this year Geraldine and I did a rail trip around England. One of our stopping off places was Great Yarmouth where we discovered the Nelson Museum. It was a smashing little museum with lots of displays and information about Nelson and his career. Having associated Nelson only with Portsmouth previously it was a surprise to find that he was a "Norfolk" man.

However what intrigued me as much as the main displays was a presentation in the courtyard of the building that described the origin of many well-known phrases. Do you know the origin of all these:

It's gone by the board

This means that something has been lost or overlooked. It comes from the words for the ships sides – starboard; larboard. Items that went over the side (accidentally or otherwise) had gone by the board.

A filthy toe-rag

Most things aboard ship were re-used.

The only things that were foul enoughto throw away were the rags made from tow or hemp that were used to dress wounds. A filthy toe-rag was the nastiest, most contemptible thing on board.

He's a son of a gun

Women who gave birth on board usually did so in a spacious area near the midship gun. If the father was unknown the child was entered in the ship's log book as a son of a gun.

It's sailing close to the wind

If you are sailing close to the wind you are gambling with fortune.If a sailing ship was headed into or close by the edge of the wind there was a chance it would come to a stop. Fatal if you were being chased.

Chock-a-block

This means something is full. When two tackle blocks meet, they can go no further.They are then chock-a-block

In the doldrums

The Doldrums are an area around the equator where there are very infrequent winds so ships could be stuck for weeks. Someone is in the doldrums when they are doing nothing.

The bitter end

The end of the ship's cable is secured to the bitts to stop it going overboard. The bitter end is where the cable joins the bitts.

The cat's out of the bag
This meant that the bo'sun had removed the cat-o-nine tails from its red baize bag, Sailors would pass the message: 'The cat's out of the bag', meaning that a flogging would definitely happen.

He's a limey
This was a name given to British sailors by Americans. British officers, notably Nelson, kept scurvy at bay by issuing lime juice to the ship's crew.

There's no room to swing a cat
The cat-o-nine tails was about six feet long. It was held at arm's length so it needed 8 feet of space. An area smaller than this had no room to swing a cat.

Pipe down
Bo'suns kept the ship in order by issuing signals on a 'call', a special tuned whistle. The tones that meant 'be quiet and keep working' were named 'Pipe Down'.

Three sheets to the wind
A sheet is a rope that tightens the sail. If it is loose the ship is hard to steer. There are three sheets on a ship and if all three are loose the ship will wander aimlessly. Like a person who is drunk.

Run the gauntlet
Nowadays this means facing up to difficulties. Sailors who ran the gauntlet were being punished for theft. They had to run down two rows of their shipmates who would beat them with lengths of knotted rope.

Let's cut and run
This refers to the times when ships needed a quick getaway. The rope of the anchor would be cut so that the ship could run before the wind. Anchors were very expensive so this was the last option.

You can whistle for it
Sailors believed that whistling when becalmed called up the wind. However whistling when sailing might turn the wind into a gale. Now, we aren't as superstitious and 'you can whistle for it' means 'there's no chance'.

It's cold enough to freeze the balls of a brass monkey
A monkey was slang for small portable brass cannon with iron ammunition balls. As brass and iron contract at different temperatures, the barrel would become too small for the balls.

Alan Vincent

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PROFILE:

Tom Hughes

Question. Which Barmouth resident once denied entry to the Royal Albert Hall to both Petula Clark and Jack Train (ITMA star) on the same evening? Correct – Tom Hughes.

Born above Dicks Shoe shop (now Cynewydd Stock Exchange – next to the Oriel Gallery) in 1931, Tom has spent his entire life living in Barmouth except for his two years National Service which he spent in RAF Uxbridge as a member of the Queen's Colour Squadron.

Educated in the Infant School which is now the Library, Tom completed his education aged 14 in the Council School (now Bendigedig) and started work at Criterion Stores. He'd only been there a few weeks when the school leaving aged increased to 15 and he was retrospectively sent back to school and rose from Class C to Class A in this extra year.

17 years as a gardener at Glan-y-Mawddach with that two years out in National Service followed by 5 years at Bryn Celyn in Arthog also in the gardening trade, Tom found himself out of work in his late 30s when the owner of Bryn Celyn died. Tom was then rehired by Lady Russon; owner of Glan-y-Mawddach, and resumed gardening as well as chauffeuring duties including the somewhat "difficult to drive in a straight line" Rolls Royce automatic with power steering.

That period of National Service between 1953 and 1955 meant that Tom performed at the Royal Albert Hall Remembrance Service in the RAF Display Team twice and apart from being Prince Philip's bodyguard on one occasion, was involved in a total of 49 military parades welcoming foreign dignitaries such as the Shah of Persia, Princes Margaret, Queen Elizabeth and yes those celebrities who were due to appear on stage at the Royal Albert Hall but didn't have the correct passes. He could have been an extra in the film, the Dambusters but they only had uniforms an inch too short. Could have become a star!

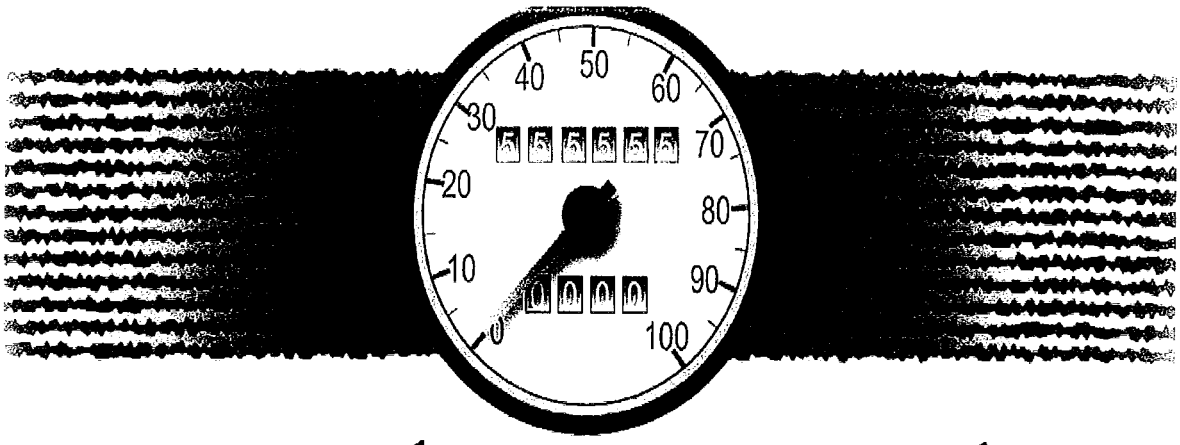
He married Violet in 1957 and they had two sons, Ken who became a professional goalkeeper and is now in the fire service in Hinckley and Carl who also still lives and works in Barmouth.

Tom joined the County Council in 1975 and worked for them as maintenance crew operating between Bontddu and Dyffryn and in his final years with the Council went on to work at the Bowling Club, Putting Green and tennis courts before retiring.

Throughout his life, Tom loved his football; played his first game in 1946 for Barmouth, was groundsman and manager, he rebuilt the stand and the pitch surround and was still helping with the ground until 2014. He still attends every game and coaches from the side-lines. He also found the time to join the Fire Service and served 20 years as a Retained Fireman. He fell off the engine once while going round the bend in Aberamffra Harbour and was left on the top floor on a call in Arthog when the ladder was taken away.

Since retirement he developed his love of painting which complemented the modelling skills he'd enjoyed all his life. His paintings are displayed and sold in Barmouth and Dyffryn and he has also begun to undertake commissions. He recently donated a model of the Chieftain Lifeboat to the RNLI in Barmouth and a special evening was held in his honour at the Lifeboat Station.

Exploiting his knowledge of the history of the town by joining the Sailors' Institute in around 1980 **(anybody know exactly when?)**and getting involved in helping with the Roundhouse (Ty Crwn) and Ty Gwyn (the Shipwreck Museum) as well as latterly with duties in the Institute itself. He has also been an active member of the local branch of the Royal British Legion. In spite of all his wide knowledge and experience, Tom has never been outside the UK. In fact he's also never been to Scotland nor to Northern Ireland. The closest he got was a scheduled military parade in France 1954 for which he failed to qualify and so didn't attend.



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Barmouth Lifeboat's Illustrious History.

When I started my research into the History of Barmouth Lifeboat little did I realise how enjoyable it would be. And when Trevor asked me to write something for the Newsletter, it was difficult to pick out one incident so I may be writing something for inclusion in subsequent newsletters as well.

Did you know, for instance that a Barmouth man was one of the first recipients of the RNLI's silver medal long before we had a lifeboat in Barmouth? Records show that, on 16 March 1825, Barmouth seaman Edmund Lewis was one of the earliest recipients of the Institution's Silver Medal for Gallantry:

'2 February 1825: In a violent gale, the crew of the vessel Neptune, New Orleans to Liverpool, abandoned her in Cardigan Bay, North Wales, leaving her drifting in a sinking condition under the high cliffs. Seven Barmouth men went to her assistance, but, having boarded her, were unable to leave and she was driven ashore by a flood tide three miles from Barmouth, Merioneth. The ship parted, her upper works drifting under the cliffs, and the men were given up for lost. Mr Lewis, attaching himself to a rope, descended an awe-inspiring precipice to board the wreck. Using ropes that he brought down for the purpose, he helped to haul all the men up the cliff to safety.'

Again, in January 1843, he played a vital role in a dramatic rescue from the schooner *Edwin:*

'BARMOUTH – 21 Jan 1843: Most truly awful were the effects of Friday and Saturday last in Cardigan bay, four vessels being wrecked within the compass of a few miles of coast attended with great loss of life and destruction of property. Vain would be the attempt to describe the distressing scene witnessed by hundreds of persons during the evening of Friday, on the schooner Edwin driving on shore, close under the town of Barmouth. Such things must be seen before man can know the distress and anguish they occasion; nor can any so truly estimate such horror as "they that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters". The following account, from an eye witness, may be depended upon, and will best convey an idea of what took place:

'The schooner Edwin of Chester, Hugh Barrow, master, with a cargo of coals for Barmouth left the St Tudwal's on Thursday morning, and arrived off Barmouth bar early on the afternoon, but could not cross owing to the insufficiency of water. The pilot boat went out and put a man (Owen Lloyd) on board, and the vessel stood out to sea for the night. On Friday it blew a terrific gale, and, towards evening, it was evident that the schooner must come on shore, and her course was watched with the most intense interest by hundreds of spectators. The vessel gradually neared the beach, and as the gale increased, with the tide, which was about 6 o'clock, she came on shore half a mile north west of Barmouth in a tremendous sea.

'The vessel rolled most awfully, and, about 8 o'clock, the main mast was carried away, and along with it, it is supposed, three of four of the crew. About 9 o'clock, after the most praiseworthy exertions, the vessel was boarded, when one boy (Hugh Hughes, a native of Llanegryn) was found on deck alive, being the only one saved. There were two dead bodies in the rigging. The boy stated that he had been asleep for some time. The vessel is a complete wreck.

'The following are the names of persons lost:- Hugh Barrow, master, Robert Lloyd, mate, Owen Lloyd, pilot, all of Barmouth; John Hughes (a native of Amlwch), David Davies (unknown) and John Jones, a passenger, son of Mr Hugh Jones, Draper, Towyn, Merioneth. None of the bodies, except those on board the vessel, have been found.

'Where everybody exerted themselves to the utmost, it perhaps may not be proper to particularise individuals, but the noble conduct of the following persons ought not to be forgotten - Captain William Roberts, of the sloop Active of Barmouth; Captain Watkin Williams of the sloop Mermaid, ***Captain Edmund Lewis of the schooner Mary of Aberdovey,*** *and Captain Evan Edwards of the schooner Ann of Barmouth. The activity, courage and presence of mind displayed by the latter gentleman was the admiration of every one present, and richly deserves some public testimonial. Captain Barrow, of the New Dove of London, was also particularly active.*

'We regret to state that the unfortunate master, mate, and pilot have left wives and children to bewail their loss. The others were young men.'
(Gwynedd Archives, Meirionnydd Office)

I have not been able to establish why the lifeboat did not go out that night. Perhaps the weather was too bad to even launch?

The late Professor Lewis Lloyd, in his book *Maritime Merioneth,* details the will of the master mariner:

'Edmund Lewis 1791-1855 ... left goods to the value of £322.1s.6d and shares in vessels to the value of £252.00.'

It is most likely that this Captain Edmund Lewis is the same Edmund Lewis who received Barmouth lifeboat's first gallantry medal in 1825.

I wonder who he was and if he has any descendants now in Barmouth?

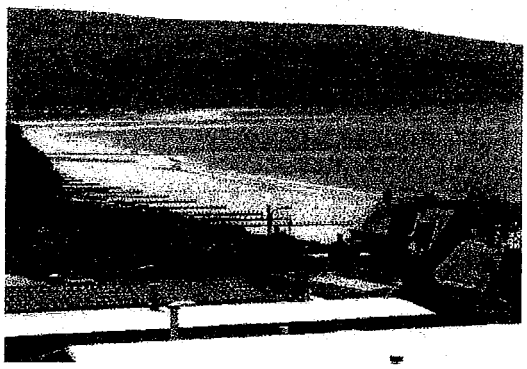
The next piece will tell of the Wreck of the Kenilworth in 1870 and another of the dramatic rescue of the French crew of Notre Dame de Boulogne shipwrecked on the causeway in 1924. Both are covered in the book which can be bought at the Lifeboat shop for £8.95.

Norma Stockford.

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125 years celebration of Barmouth Sailors' Institute

When Beth asked me to do a snapshot (not a history lecture) of Barmouth Sailors' Institute 125 years history, I thought I'd do it without reading from paper but have changed my mind in case I digress too much!

To get more of an idea of the Institute and its beginnings and reason for its existence, I'll go back in time a little. As late as 1824 there was only one parish church in the Barmouth area - St. Mary's in Llanaber.

By the time Canon Edward Hughes arrived in Barmouth in 1879, St. David's had been built on the site of an old shipyard. Canon Hughes was well known for his compassion and having his parishioner's needs at heart and realised there was a need for a place of rest and relaxation for 'The people of the Quay' - a meeting place for mariners in a Temperance atmosphere - and so the Sailors' Institute and Reading Room was born.

Our Institute is the last remaining example of this kind of Sailors' Institute in daily use in Wales. These Institutes started with the advent of the railway. When the railway came to Barmouth around 1867, a lot of the shipping trade was lost and seafarers had to look further afield for employment. They went to Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, London and other far away ports (as they were in those days) and their families stayed behind of course. When the menfolk were sailing locally, the family knew moreorless where they were but with the new situation, there was a lack of communication. When the men joined a ship they would sign Articles which could quite legally keep them away for 2 years.

The Institute enabled families to keep track of voyages by consulting the Shipping Gazette, Lloyd's Register, etc. The READING ROOM provided a place to rest and chat - reading newspapers and maybe browse through the extensive library. Many of the books being donated by local families - the Listers, Dorsets, Ricketts and Fanny Talbot. The Reading Room is still to this day virtually as it was in those days At the rear of the building the BILLIARD ROOM was the place for a bit of friendly competition.

Over the years many interesting pictures, photographs and paintings have been acquired and now adorn three full walls. There are various Certificates of Merit including one to John Morris acknowledging 30 years service as coxswain of Barmouth lifeboat. The fourth wall has glass fronted cabinets which hold the library of 740 books covering many subjects. There are volumes of The Waverley Novels, London Illustrated News, Penny Cyclopaedia and of course sea stories.

A set of sea charts were given and are housed in a special wall cabinet. There is an inscription on the cabinet to the effect:

"Maps and charts entrusted to the Rector of Llanaber for the use of Seamen of Barmouth in remembrance of their friend George Quartus Pine Talbot who died at Lakeside May 28th 1888.

The charts are mainly dated 1823-26 and cover European waters, England and Wales, South America, the China Sea and Japan. Some have voyages plotted on them.

We also have models of ships and an interesting model depicting Barmouth harbour back in the days when the sea came up Church Street past Perry's the Jewellers and The Tilman.

In the late '70's early 80's the Institute building fell into a bad state of repair. In 1984 a valiant band of volunteers did a sterling job of saving the building, obtaining a small grant from the Prince of Wales Trust. Unfortunately there weren't sufficient funds to do a complete permanent job. The roof was replaced with new corrugated iron sheeting but the well rusted outer walls had the render applied which many people will remember.

In the late 90's the building was again in need of TLC and with the help of Canon Wallis Thomas, a grant of £1000 was obtained from the Bernard Piggott Trust. This Trust only operates in Birmingham and North West Wales. It set the ball rolling and after much pleading to other various grant pots, the Barmouth Sailors' Institute was fully restored and opened again to the public in July 2005.

The original concept of Canon Hughes in 1890 is still maintained today. Daily newspapers, Cambrian News and a place to sit and look out over the harbour or hold a small meeting.

Bobby Wyn as I know him, has many fond memories of the Sailors' Institute and the Quay. A few years ago he wrote of these in a piece for our newsletter. They remind me very much of the tales my husband, a friend of Bobby's, used to tell me about life as a child. Bobby, or Mr. Robert Wyn Jones has given me permission to relate his memories to you, as I think they sum up the Institute to a tee. I have taken extracts relating to the Institute. A full version for anyone to see is at the back of the church.

Janet Griffith

FOND MEMORIES

My fond memories of the Sailors' Institute or 'Newsroom' as the older generation used to call it are, The Billiards & Snooker room, where many happy hours were spent when we were teenagers, especially when the wind was howling outside and the rain beating down on the corrugated sheeting. A cosy place on a cold evening, with a piped stove giving out a comfortable warmth. There were team competitions, with the Fire Brigade, Railway, Post Office, etc. taking part. At Christmas time there was the 'Big Ship' tournament, where individuals would compete against each other, the first prize being a goose. (Alas these days a goose is too expensive and has been replaced by a meat voucher! J.G.)

The only thing allowed to disturb the concentration during the games was the sound of a steam train rumbling by, adjacent to, and behind the building.

As youngsters we were often 'roped in' to help clear the sand off the back roof, after the storms.

I was very young then, but can still remember the pleasant view from the front window of the reading room, the skiffs, punts, motor boats and small sailing craft bobbing up and down on a sunny day. At the far end of the beach, just below the old wooden railway bridge, were the clothes lines belonging to the nearby houses, with the clothes fluttering in the breeze.

Inside the air was filled with the smell of strong shag tobacco, (Baco'r Bryniau.) I must say it was not unpleasant, although today I suppose it would not be too agreeable. We listened to the old salts relating their various tales. Robert Jones (my grandfather) and his brother Jack Jones, both ex. sailing ship seamen. (Bob has listed many more characters. J.G.). Again the stove, in the centre, burning merrily if the need arose. The main language for young and old was of course Welsh.

Those days have gone, but we must be very grateful to all subscription members, and most of all to the officials who work so hard to keep the Institute going for future generations. It does play such an important part in the history and heritage of Barmouth quay.

Robert Wyn Jones, CaderBetti.

And so ends the history lesson.

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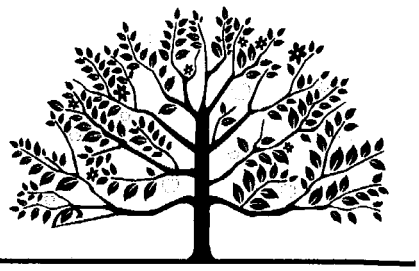
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