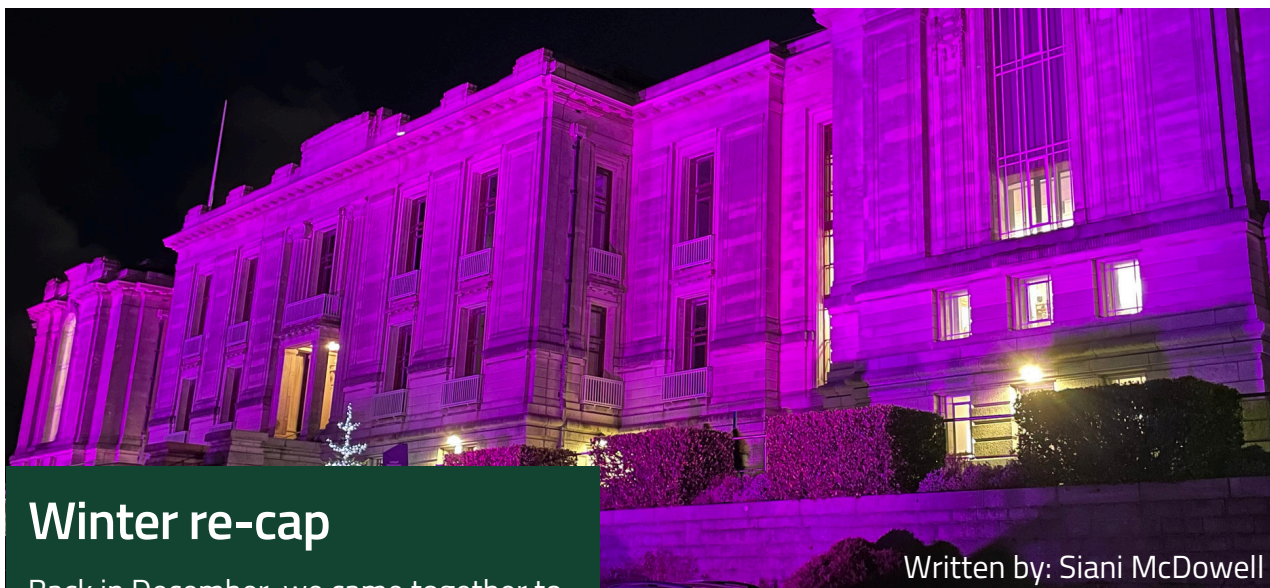


# VOLUNTEER'S VOICE



## Winter re-cap

Back in December, we came together to celebrate our volunteers at their Annual Celebration Event. The highlights were a fun 'News-reel' film featuring interviews with staff and volunteers, celebrating milestones, and sharing a heartfelt thank you to everyone who supports the scheme. Dafydd Tudur, NLW Head of Engagement shared congratulations to volunteers on their involvement in the Welsh Women's Peace Petition.

Volunteer Owen Watkin gave an incredibly insightful talk on The Gorsedd project - which took us all by storm. The library community is very much looking forward to learning more and seeing how this project develops over the months and years. It was a fantastic afternoon filled with laughter, tea, and cake - a true community gathering.

Written by: Siani McDowell

## Brighter days ahead...

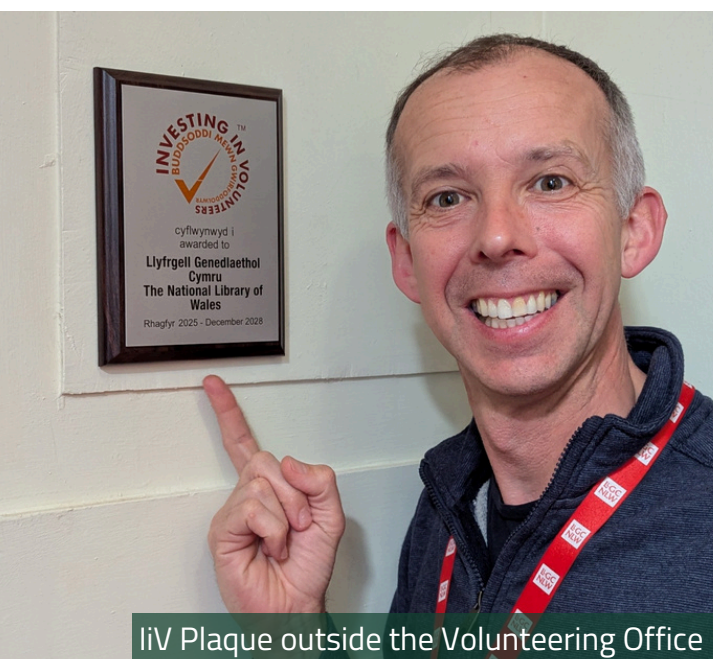
As winter draws to a close and we look forward to lighter days, it's the perfect time to reflect on the traditions that bring comfort during the colder months. For this quarter's issue, volunteer Siani McDowell shares how their family embraces Candlemas - a celebration that blends history, folklore, and cozy rituals.

From candlelit evenings, wassail-inspired treats to board games and stories passed down through generations - their reflections remind us that even in the darkest season, there's room for warmth, connection, and a little magic.

February also brings us LGBTQ+ History Month and Siani shares insight as to how the library celebrates. To learn more about volunteer Siani and to read their articles head to pages 4-8.

## News:

- \* We're proud to announce that our scheme has been officially awarded the **Investing in Volunteers (iV) Accreditation**, the UK's leading quality standard for volunteer management. This recognition confirms that we provide an inclusive, well-supported, and rewarding experience for all our volunteers. This accreditation demonstrates our commitment to best practice in planning, recruitment, safeguarding, and valuing volunteers, ensuring that everyone who gives their time feels respected and empowered. Again, **thank you to the volunteers who gave their feedback during the assessment period**. This achievement strengthens our reputation, boosts volunteer confidence, and shows funders and partners that we deliver excellence in volunteering. **We now have an official commemorative plaque on display outside the volunteering department!**



iV Plaque outside the Volunteering Office

- \* Volunteers were invited to the Library's first **Staff Forum 'Get-together'**, where staff and volunteers from the **LGBTQ+, Race & Ethnicity, and Disability Forums** gathered for tea and cake in Pendinas Café. The session offered an opportunity to meet Forum members, and share ideas on how we can continue building an inclusive and supportive environment across the Library.
- \* **Artist Bethan Hughes led a creative workshop for volunteers**, inspired by the Welsh Women's Peace Petition. Participants stitched their ancestral signatures into cloth, honouring the women who signed the historic pledge for peace.



Creative Workshop with Bethan Hughes

- \* Following a productive Steering Group meeting in 2025, the Sharing & Support Programme (formerly the mentoring programme) has been re-framed to be more inclusive and accessible for both our current volunteers and those who will join us in the future. This refreshed approach emphasises the value of sharing knowledge, learning from one another, and offering mutual support in everyday tasks and roles. **Funded by the WCVA, this initiative now has a new training platform available for volunteers interested in supporting others, helping them build confidence and develop collaborative skills.**

## Clwb Sgwrsio

If you are a Welsh learner, there is still the opportunity to practice the language in a friendly and informal setting.

The club gathers every Monday from 11:00 – 11:45 at the Pen Dinas Café.

Contact Eilir for more info on joining:  
eilir.evans@llyfrgell.cymru

### Current Stats

#### Total volunteers:

65 volunteers in weekly

#### Volunteer hours:

Dec: 640, Jan: 804, Feb: 860

#### Projects and tasks in progress:

16 projects and tasks are being worked on, and Library staff continue to seek out even more exciting opportunities.

### Events...

- \* **Lunchtime Art Club! |** Creative workshops for staff and volunteers happening throughout March in the Portraits & Power Exhibition.

#### Creative Writing with Eluned:

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March, 13:00-13:40

#### Observational Drawing with Guto:

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March, 13:00 - 13:40

#### Visible Darning with Thea:

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March, 13:00-13:40

#### Portraits and Feelings (auf Deutsch!) with

**Phoebe:** Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March, 13:00 - 13:40

- \* **Kicking the Bar: Royal Commission Historical Walk | Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May**

Join Royal Commission staff and architectural historian Richard Suggett for a relaxed and fully accessible 2km historical walk along Aberystwyth's iconic promenade. This inclusive, unhurried walk includes regular seated rest breaks, and participants are welcome to join or leave at any point to suit their needs.

For more information on these events contact the volunteer team at [volunteering@library.wales](mailto:volunteering@library.wales) or pop into the office for a chat.



## LGBTQ+ History Month at NLW

The National Library of Wales is proudly celebrating LGBTQ+ History Month with a series of events and displays highlighting queer creativity, community, and heritage. This year's programme included **Off the Wall, a joyful after-hours takeover featuring LGBTQ+ performances inspired by the Portrait & Power exhibition**. The Library is also offering creative workshops for LGBTQ+ adults, providing space for writing, performance, and reflection on identity. **In Peniarth, visitors can explore a new film set, LGBTQ+ Histories from Wales, featuring a curated mix of archival clips that spotlight queer lives across the decades. The North Reading Room also showcases a vibrant display of books celebrating LGBTQ+ authors and stories.** Titles include **Queer Disability Through History** by Daisy Holder, **Cranogwen** by Jane Aaron, **Forbidden Lives** by Norena Shopland, **LGBTQ+ Icons** by David Lee Csicsko and Owen Keehnen, and **A Gay History of Wales** by Daryl Leeworthy.

Much of this work is directly supported by the **Library's LGBTQ+ Staff Forum, which advocates for queer voices, stories, and representation throughout the institution**. The Forum provides the insight, encouragement, and accountability that help ensure events like LGBTQ+ History Month are celebrated meaningfully and that queer visitors feel welcomed and seen across the Library. Formed in January 2025, the Forum meets monthly to discuss issues affecting LGBTQ+ staff, volunteers, and communities. **Members - both queer people and allies - join for many reasons: to build community, support queer family members, uncover hidden collections, or push for better representation in exhibitions, collections, and public-facing programmes.** The group regularly works with departments across the Library to ensure Pride flags are displayed, relevant books are highlighted, and queer stories are woven into the national narrative the Library preserves.

The Forum also champions wider equality initiatives. It is currently working to introduce free sanitary products in all bathrooms and is organising training with local trans charity Project Luna to ensure the Library continues to be a safe and supportive space for trans and non-binary people. **The Forum is also helping shape the Library's presence at Aberystwyth Pride on Saturday 25th April.**

As some of the discussions that take place in forum meetings are very sensitive, not all meetings are open to volunteers. However, volunteers are welcome to get in touch – we can arrange for a volunteer-focused meeting where volunteers and staff members of the forum come together. We are working on creating a regular schedule of open meetings, probably every few months, so volunteer voices are consistently part of the conversation – stay tuned! In the meantime, you can contact the forum any time at [fforwm.lldtc@llyfrgell.cymru](mailto:fforwm.lldtc@llyfrgell.cymru), or ask Thea, Eilir or Cledan to arrange a chat.



## Get to know Siani, this issue's Writer in Residence!

I've been volunteering at the National Library for going on three years now. The fascinating trip I went on in primary school made volunteering here pretty much a done deal for me. While here I've worked on all kinds of projects such as the Welsh Poets and Authors Project, Transcribing ITV Index Cards, writing titles for Clip Cymru, and most recently Geo Location work for the ITV film archive. Volunteering here has been amazing; not just working in such a beautiful and historic building but working alongside lovely people and being given a chance to practise my Welsh.

I've always been very bookish, and one of my favourite places to visit growing up (besides the NLW) was the old town library in Aberystwyth. It was such a magical place to me; cozy, warm and welcoming.

When I'm not reading or gaming, you'll usually find me writing. I've always dreamed of being a writer, especially in the fantasy genre, where I can build whole worlds, cultures, and histories from the ground up. I'm also passionate about exploring themes like mental health, identity, self-acceptance and inclusivity in my work; subjects like these mean a lot to me, having grown up as a queer and autistic person.

## Traditions by Candlelight

Growing up, very few people seemed to know anything about celebrating Candlemas. So much so, I started thinking it was something our Mam had made up! It's only when I started researching it for this article that I've come to fully understand and appreciate this slowly fading holiday. I reached out to Llanbadarn Church in Aberystwyth, to ask how this tradition came to be and how it is celebrated in the local community. Andrew Loat, Clergy of the parish shared his insights. I want to extend my thanks for his help! Candlemas, also known as The Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, is celebrated on the 2nd of February. Though a Christian holiday, it also has roots in Paganism. Like old Celtic traditions such as the Irish Imbolc, it celebrates the coming of spring and is often associated with renewal and lighter days.

In Christian belief, it celebrates Mary and Joseph's visit to the Temple, Jesus' presentation to God and his early life. It's also known as St. Brigid's Day, after Brigid; Celtic goddess and Christian saint, called Ffraid in Welsh. It's a holiday my family has celebrated for as long as I can remember. We aren't particularly religious in any way, so our Candlemas is a slight mishmash of traditions from different religions and beliefs. It blends theological meaning, ancient ritual, and folk tradition, offering a vivid expression of faith, light, and hope.

We light candles all over the house and keep the decorations up - which makes the house oh so nice and cozy during the harsh winter months! We also tend to mix in some Wassail traditions such as having apple-based foods and punch. A wassail tradition is all about the old custom of wassailing - basically going around in winter, sharing a warm spiced drink, and offering good wishes and blessings. Together, we have a special homecooked meal, play board games, and open more presents which are kept on the tree. Yes, on the tree. Many of these traditions aren't things we learned about in books or at school but were passed down; from my Great Nanny Mac to my Mam, from her to us, and maybe one day from us to the next generation of our family.

Like most holidays, Candlemas has many poems dedicated to it and its traditions. The one best known to me is a mid-17th century poem by Robert Herrick about the tradition of taking down the decorations. As my Mam (the family Candlemas Crownholder) has always said since we were children, "we have to take down the decorations before we get goblins!" - and I always wondered if that's how her and dad ended up with me and my brothers...

## Ceremony Upon Candlemas Eve

Down with the rosemary, and so  
Down with the bays and mistletoe;  
Down with the holly, ivy, all  
Wherewith ye dress'd the Christmas Hall;  
That so the superstitious find  
No one least branch there left behind;  
For look, how many leaves there be  
Neglected there, maids, trust to me,  
So many goblins you shall see.

- Robert Herrick

There are also several Candlemas rhymes about the weather, specifically how the weather on Candlemas day will indicate the weather for the rest of the year. There are many different variations, but most if not all of them follow a similar pattern, such as these two;

*If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, Winter will have another fight. If Candlemas Day brings cloud and rain, Winter won't come again.*

*If Candlemas Day comes fierce and rough, Winter is gone far enough. When Candlemas Day is bright and clear, the worst of Winter is to appear.*

Candles are lighted, in homes and churches, to represent the light of Jesus or warmer days to come (or both, depending on your beliefs). People used to bring candles from home to church so they could be blessed and bless their home in turn. These days, some churches celebrate Candlemas with a procession of lit candles, and special Bible readings at Communion Services. Snowdrops, or Candlemas Bells, were once commonly used to decorate houses and churches as they are often seen as a symbol of purity. Decorations are kept up until Candlemas Eve, as it's considered bad luck to keep them up after Candlemas.

In short, Candlemas is a family tradition that's near and dear to my heart. To me it marks the true end of the winter season, and the beginning of a new and (hopefully) brighter year ahead. As we move further into the future, a lot of traditions and holidays like Candlemas are slowly fading out and being lost to the next generations. Which I think is a great shame. These celebrations are how we connect the past, present and future while also giving us an excuse to kick back from life and spend time with our loved ones. In writing this, I hope it'll spark some interest in the holiday. Even if you choose not to celebrate it, sharing the history and traditions can keep these parts of culture alive for a little bit longer.





## OPEN CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!

We're excited to announce an Open Call for original creative writing and poetry submissions for the **Spring Issue of Volunteer's Voice**, publishing in May 2026.

For this issue, we invite volunteers to submit a short poem or brief creative piece inspired by the theme "**Spring Happiness.**" Please also include a photograph you have taken yourself of a spring moment that has inspired you to capture it in either poetry or prose - this image will be published alongside the selected piece in the newsletter. You are welcome to interpret this theme in any way you wish - **as a story, a feeling, a character, a memory, or anything that sparks joy.** Submissions may be in Welsh or English.

### To keep things accessible, we ask that:

- Poems be no longer than 10 lines
- Stories be brief of up to 100 words

Two pieces will be chosen to appear in the next issue of the newsletter. We can't wait to see what inspires you - and to share your creativity with the Library. Send your submissions to: [thea.batty@llyfrgell.cymru](mailto:thea.batty@llyfrgell.cymru)



Interested in joining our volunteer community? Please get in touch:

Eilir Evans | Volunteers' Co-ordinator

Email: [volunteering@library.wales](mailto:volunteering@library.wales)

Phone: (01970) 632424