

VOLUNTEERS' VOICE



Latest Updates

In this edition of the Volunteers' Voice, we share progress updates on our projects and express our heartfelt gratitude for the tasks that have been completed.

Since our last issue, we are excited to welcome seven new volunteers to our community. Our dedicated team members Eilir, Cledan, and Thea have been busy organizing an exciting event for this year's Volunteers' Week 2026.

To discover the names of our new volunteers and learn more about the upcoming event, be sure to turn to page 3.

This issue contains news from the past few weeks, which includes the guided walk with architectural historian Richard Suggett from the Royal Commission.

Writer's thoughts:

Volunteer Lynne Blanchfield welcomes the arrival of spring and invites our volunteer community to share their creative writing and poetry, accompanied by a photograph, all inspired by the theme of Spring Happiness (see pages 4-5). Lynne was inspired by a recent NLW talk given by John Barnie about his poetry collection, *Afterlives*. He delved into how images can spark words, which inspired the theme for this call for volunteer submissions.

Additionally, Lynne conducted an interview with the Library's Curator of Photography, Wil Troughton, as a farewell feature ahead of his retirement this summer (see pages 6-7).

News:

Volunteers' contributions to the Welsh Women's Peace Petition were completed back in March, and we would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the volunteers involved. Their dedication and commitment played a crucial role in the success of this project.

Several volunteers played a vital role in testing the new Clip Cymru website, helping to identify issues and providing valuable feedback on usability and accessibility. Thank you to everyone who helped test the developing site.

Volunteers Lynne M, Sue, and Esme contributed to the research of the Women's Archive Wales project, searching for information on equality policies published in the Western Mail during the 1970s. Volunteers are also supporting the Unique Collections Department with a new task of documenting information on Welsh farm names from printed records in the Maps Unit, as well as sorting handwritten catalogue entries for railway maps into book record number sequences.

At the beginning of May, the Royal Commission invited our volunteer community on a historical walk along Aberystwyth's promenade guided by architectural historian Richard Suggett. We were very lucky with the weather: the sun was shining and the sea was calm. Volunteers from NLW and the Royal Commission learned about the striking historic buildings along the seafront, starting at the War Memorial and finishing - traditionally - by kicking the bar at the far end of the promenade. Here's what our volunteers have to share about their experience:

"I enjoyed the experience and learned more about the architecture of the promenade in Aberystwyth. Very interesting."

"I really enjoyed the excursion. It was lovely to be with the other volunteers, Library staff, and Commission staff outside the Library on such a nice day."



Events

Volunteers' Week (June 1-7) is a unique annual celebration dedicated to highlighting the incredible contributions made by volunteers. It serves as a moment for the Library to acknowledge, appreciate, and express gratitude to those who generously dedicate their time and skills to assist others and support vital causes within their communities.

This year, we have arranged a seminar and exhibition tour of Curator's Lens: A Career in Collecting with Curator of Photography, Wil Troughton. Join us for an engaging exhibition tour, insightful talk, and Q&A session, complemented by tea and cake to enjoy.

When? Tuesday 9th June, 13:30-15:00

Where? Council Chambers, NLW

For more information on these events contact the volunteer team at volunteering@library.wales or pop into the office for a chat.

Clwb Sgwrsio

If you are a Welsh learner, there is still the opportunity to practise 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:

81 volunteers

Volunteer hours:

March: 959hrs, April: 773hrs, May: 577hrs

Projects and tasks in progress:

16 projects are currently in progress and Library staff continue to seek out even more exciting opportunities.

Welcome!

We would like to extend a warm welcome to our new volunteers: **Mary, Archie, Grace, Maia, Olu, Leila, Howard.**



SPRING HAPPINESS

To welcome the spring season, Lynne Blanchfield invited volunteers to tap into their creativity by crafting and submitting original works, offering a chance for the community to express themselves through the art of writing. Here's what she has to say about herself and her passion for writing:

I have loved creative writing and poetry since childhood. I studied at UCW Aberystwyth in the 1970s and 80s, where I gained my BA, MA and PhD, specialising in Middle English poetry. I then went on to have a rewarding 16-year career at the Open University in Cambridge, teaching English literature to adult learners and working in a range of academic roles. Since 2022, I have been a member of *Ysgol Farddol yr Holl Fyd*, developing my skills in writing poetry in *cynghanedd* (a style of strict-metre sound-patterning unique to Welsh). In 2024, after passing examinations specialising in Welsh poetry, I was admitted to the Gorsedd. Since returning to Aberystwyth in 2013, I have volunteered on many projects at the National Library of Wales, currently providing Welsh and English subtitles for recordings of Drwm talks on the Library's YouTube channel. Having sat the 'Learn Welsh for Adults' examinations from Foundation through to Proficiency level, I am keen to support other learners. My key message is: if I can do it, you can do it!

The poem below is a straight translation from my original Welsh - I can't reproduce the *cynghanedd*! Seeing pink almond blossom always evokes my childhood in Prestatyn, before having to leave Wales. Poetry does not appeal to everyone, of course. However, with Aberystwyth now recognised as a UNESCO City of Literature, I suggested holding a literary competition in this newsletter as a way of sharing my passion for poetry and creative writing with fellow volunteers. So, give it a go - and keep going!



**I'm thinking of you, my Prestatyn.
A small girl out for hours in the fresh air;
I climbed, singing happily,
up the almond tree.
This was my tranquil den –
I lay amidst the leaves; I stared,
with the whispering pink almond blossom
all around me,
at the sunlight winking
through the petals
from the brilliant blue sky,
and I wanted all this to last forever.**



SPRING

... is an unpredictable thing.
 Bright morning sun sparkles
 the frost on the mountain grass.
 Dancing daffodils bow their heads
 against sharp sleety showers.
 Easter lambs are hatching snowy white
 onto fresh sweet green grass,
 testing their springs on the trampoline turf.
 The first lone swallow's wings
 slice through the morning mist.
 Chiff-chaff shouts out his name
 in case we forgot.
 But Spring is truly here at last
 when postmen, Cledan and Eilir
 are back in shorts.

By Lulu Pollock

SCENTS OF SPRING

The people are returning! They're looking for ice-cream and seaside trinkets. They smell of sweat and perfume – a blend of bergamot, coconut, amber, and vanilla orchids wafts across the sand.

Hotel housekeepers spray hearts of floral polish onto tables.

Grandmas make fresh banana bread, dotted with chocolate eggs.

Daffodils watch from their seafront windowsills as students set up volleyball nets on the beach.

The snowdrops wilt but colour sprouts through the cracks of the town – bright nail gel, arcade lights, cherry blossom lattes, the glossy grey sheen of a dolphin. And for the first time in months, I smell sunscreen!



By Maia Patemanova



MEET A MEMBER OF STAFF!

Lynne had a chat with the Library's Curator of Photography, Wil Troughton ahead of his retirement.

According to Rhian Gibson's introduction to Wil's talk on 'Lost Aberystwyth', Wil is "the Bruce Springsteen, or even Oasis of the National Library of Wales – his gigs sell out very quickly, and there's always a waiting list."

Many people have said how sad they are to be losing Wil to his well-deserved retirement in July 2026, after a career spanning some 34 years. It was my privilege to interview Wil, and in this article, he reflects on some of the highlights from his time here, on Aberystwyth itself, and looks ahead to the future of the collections and the role of volunteers in helping to preserve and promote them.

Wil's passion for and dedication to the photography collections radiates through this interview, his books and talks. He started at the NLW on 13 January 1992, which he remembers well.

He was Assistant Curator, though curiously there was no post of 'Curator' at the time: "that's just how things worked!" The collections have mushroomed in his time: he started on some 900 photo albums, and to date there are some 7,200: seven times the size it was! About 20-30,000 photographs a year are received at the Library. And we're not talking just about paper prints but formats such as slides, negatives, tapes and CDs that have to be stored, restored, catalogued and made accessible. Much of this is corporate material. When digital photography came in, many paper photographs have been donated to curated collections as at the NLW.

Photos from companies such as the Tourist Board of Wales go out of date quite quickly, so they are pleased to pass them on for historical research. However, digitisation is a 'double-edged sword': how much will be around in 50 years' time is debatable as technology overtakes a library's ability to 'read' old hardware such as floppy disks (remember those?!). Even some of the newer CDs have already been corrupted. When asked if he could pick out a favourite photo or collection from so many, Wil chose an early project: the Arthur Lewis collection spanning the 1890s to the late 1930s. He also enjoys "delving into Geoff Charles" for the beauty of his technique and focus on the subject. Wil is very proud of the way the whole of the photographic archive has developed because it's comprehensive and inclusive. Proving that a collection's importance grows over time and it's important for that to be recognised.

Born and raised in Aberystwyth, Wil is well-respected for his books and talks on its history and people. He expresses a preference for writing and researching over lecturing because "that's where the surprises come". But he enjoys planning lectures and chooses the best images (from thousands) to match the subject. He starts with one or two "must-haves" and then the rest "fall into place" beautifully, as his audiences know well.

Much of the focus of both these activities is on what we've lost in Aberystwyth. Looking back to its heyday, he says "it used to be that Great Darkgate Street was full of shops such as Woolworths, and now there are empty shops. It's a shame that the town has fallen so far behind now", and feels that we've "lost out in many ways." Leaving aside the anxious present, Wil is optimistic that Aber will get better. The Old College "will be a big success", and with its many planned artistic, creative, historical and educational facilities will provide somewhere that whole families can go and do interesting things when it rains, and when the Museum re-opens its doors at much the same time, it will enliven the high street as well and draw people back to Aberystwyth. Wil would particularly like to see the Putting Green coming back! He used to spend hours there as a child.

When asked what would be his 'now for something completely different' activity during retirement, he chose birdwatching, which is of keen interest to him so he's looking forward to having the time to pursue and expand it beyond the confines of his own garden – where his cat 'restricts' the range of species he can observe! Being close to woodland, coastal paths and mountains is a great asset of living in Aberystwyth – particularly for photographers.

I asked cheekily for a 'scoop' for the Volunteers' Voice – for a fact that few people know about Wil – his answer came unhesitatingly: "I've run the Reykjavík Ultra Marathon": that is, 33.5 miles or 55 kilometres! He undertook this challenge with two friends in June of 2003, starting from the ancient volcanic area of Landmannalaugar. In good weather they ran through very varied terrain from bubbling mud puddles and gaseous rocks, upwards to thigh-deep mountain snow, to black-sand deserts. Together they crossed through freezing glacial melt-water rivers, and to end, climbed up a hill three times the height of Consi – and all after running 30-odd miles just to get there! He says the landscape was so wonderful it just draws you through to see what's over the next hill or round the next corner. And yes, he'd do it all over again!

We all thank Wil for his approachability, encouragement, and the brilliant presentations of all his hard work on these unique collections during his long career. We will miss you. When I asked what piece of advice he would pass on to our current and prospective volunteers, Wil immediately enthuses about the "wealth of interesting projects" in the Library, and that it's a matter for volunteers to "find the one that's most interesting to you". The Library, he says, is "full of surprises – so dig in and get going and see what happens, see what turns up!" And that is the perfect note to end on.



FAREWELL

We would like to take a moment to thank all the volunteers who have left us this quarter. We are incredibly grateful for your support, and we say a bittersweet farewell...



ABIGAIL AND ESME HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THEIR THIRD YEAR AT UNIVERSITY AND ARE APPROACHING GRADUATION.



GWILYM BECAME SUCCESSFUL IN GAINING EMPLOYMENT.



ARNOLD IS FOCUSING ON HIS UNIVERSITY STUDIES.



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

Email: volunteering@library.wales

Phone: (01970) 632424