talesfromwales.net
promoting emerging Welsh authors and artists
Summer 2018

Short Stories
'Strangers Waiting' – Sally Spedding
'Saved By The Bell' – Bel Roberts
'Remember Yesterday?' – Phil Rowlands
'Coppers: Cash and Convenience' – Ian Price
'The Man Who Kept the Red Flag Flying' – Dave Edwards

Author Extracts
'The Crossing Place' – Karen Ankers
'Where Rowans Intertwine' – Margaret Grant
'Hidden Chapters' – Mary Grand

Blogs
Terry Victor – #Grammar Blog of Wordliness
Busy’s Back!!! – Lucy Mitchell

Artists
Abergavenny Artists
John Hurst
Linda Wood
Katherine Jordan
Lavinia O’Brien
Mary James

Bits & Pieces
"Re-wind, Fast-forward" – Angela Saunderson
'Forgotten Daze' – Tony Lawrence
'No Pit For You Boy' – Arthur Cole

Wales Around the World
Melanie Peet – 'That Man'
Lynsey Berry – 'Coming Home to Coombs'

Help For Writers
Sueen Gollacher on the Importance of Blogging.

Spotlight On... 
... Llanelli Writer's
EDITORIAL

"Raising the Flag for Welsh Writers"

The illustrations on this month’s cover are drawn from the work of Kate Glanville who produces fantastic hand painted glazed tiles to order from her pottery workshop in Bethlehem near Llandeilo. https://www.kateglanville.com

One of the most pleasing aspects of publishing a magazine is the people you meet along the way. Meet this month's contributors. . .

**Sally Spedding** is judging this years International Welsh Poetry Competition but still took time out to contribute 'Strangers Waiting' a story about a young girl accompanying a group of Welsh cattle drovers. Evocative imagery and a compelling plot make this a must read.

'Coppers, Cash and Convenience' by **Ian Price** features two valley characters, sadly a dying breed. Their antics are beautifully captured in this humorous tale.

**Bel Roberts** contributes another little gem in 'Saved By The Bell' a tongue in cheek tale of a harassed comprehensive school teacher.

'Remember Yesterday?' A story of teenage angst that lingered into later middle age with embarrassing consequences.

**Dave Edwards** provides an extract from his book 'The Nine Stone Cowboy'- a remarkable true story of a boy from the Rhonda Valley who was instrumental in helping Manchester United recover from the Munich disaster.

**Terry Victor** is a blogger with a difference. If you love words then this is the blog for you. Fascinating and meticulously researched, 'You Must Remember This' is quite simply unforgettable.

'The Diary of Roxy Collins' by **Lucy Mitchell** is back by popular demand.

**Seamus Gallacher** offers **Advice To Authors** on why they should consider blogging as essential to their success.

It seems we have more than our fair share of talented artists in Wales. The stunning work of local artists from Abergavenny is testament to this.

In our **Wales Around the World** section **Melanie Peet** from New Zealand pays homage to a remarkable and courageous man - her Dad. Australian **Tony Berry** embarks on a quest to discover his Welsh roots.

In our **Bits and Pieces** section **Tony Lawrence's** 'Forgotten Daze' is a story that will resonate with many of us.

**Angela Saunderson's** 'Re-wind, Fast-forward' is innovative and hints at a real talent emerging.

Our **Author Extracts** include. . .

**Karen Ankers** 'The Crossing Place' is a dark edged love story.

'Where Rowans Intertwine' by **Margaret Grant** is a historical novel which will fascinate those interested in things Celtic, Druid, Roman or Pagan, and create an awakening to healing and life purpose.

'Hidden Chapters' by **Mary Grand** is an optimistic novel about the hope and the courage each of us can find within ourselves to own our past and take control of the next chapter of our lives.

We have lift off! Tales From Wales was launched on March 1st and as I write has already been downloaded 286 times. That's not counting any copies that may have been shared with friends and family.

A big THANK YOU to everyone involved. It has given us a solid base to build on and hopefully you will continue to support us.

Given that we are producing four issues a year there will be plenty of opportunity for writers to be featured several times. We need you to keep sharing on social media and to your friends via email etc.

I have other ideas simmering in the background but for this first year let's all concentrate on making YOUR magazine a resounding success.
The mist still lay low enough to seal all the penitent but imperfect souls close to the winter earth. Including herself, thought fifteen year old Eira Williams for her guilty pleasure in leaving the constraints of home. Named after the snows that linger like shreds of sail cloth on Capel Ffin, she was now just as pale, just as frozen after a long day on the road, and let Fly the head drover's dog lick her face. He reeked of cow dung but no matter, with his tongue like hot bacon on her cheek and his ribby warmth enough to keep her from death, she gripped his collar as if he was the only rock back in the flooded river Bran. All she could see were his two front paws, white as ladies' gloves. The rest so blurred that the girl come to work at Castle Ashby House in Northamptonshire couldn't see where her bed for the night and the coat she'd sleep in began.

That garment was her father's most prized possession, specially cleaned of straw for the morning the porthmon Moses Richards called to add her to his herd of Pembrokeshire Blacks strung out like lumps of coal along by Galt y Mwyn, and impatient to be off.

"Don't ever be parted from it." Evan Williams warned. "The Saes will sell anything my girl."
"Oh Evan, don't." Plead Mrs. Williams. "It'll do her good to see the world and get fattened up with the rest of them. Won't it, cariad?"

Eira nodded, aware that Moses' twin kept his piggy eyes on her all the time.
"You forgotten about Non Jenkins then?" The farmer persisted, buttoning up his daughter with the best boar's teeth on the best 'brethyn cartref', rough on her throat but heavy as a shield against his fears, so she could at least smile a farewell to them both and wave once they'd merged into the drizzle.

But Eira heeded him nevertheless, and the coat stayed on her back for all of the next three weeks. Through Sennybridge and the joining with Llew Lewis's drove of Shorthorns. Though Aberhonddu, Hereford and places she couldn't pronounce, as west became east with the weather grown cold as prayers of the dying. However, those weren't the only changes.

By the time they'd reached Northamptonshire she knew Aaron Richards had a mind to make her his woman. She could tell the way he fixed on her and worked his tongue round his lips whenever she caught his eye. Twice she'd fought him off, and twice he'd returned for more. So now with night falling, Eira made sure she was settled well away from him and Gwallter Jones in the dark bank along Sulgrave Lane.
Suddenly a whistle, and the dog leapt from her lap. Moses Richards was swearing that God must have dropped his guard and let Satan take his place.
"Those who blaspheme on All Souls will have their hearts bound with flax," she whispered, then sat bolt upright, her ears tuned to a blur of sound which gathered momentum like the workers' chants in the forestry.
But this was no singing.
"Haiptrw Ho!" Boomed through the mist, alerting her into the hedge. She clung to the pleached hawthorn as the panic swell grew closer, thundering down to the deep end of the world, choking the narrow lane with the Pembrokehshire Blacks in front taking low branches on their shoulders.
Then the Shorthorn bullocks sensing freedom, pressed the leaders up the banks until the way ahead was clear. Eira felt them on her coat and prayed aloud until it was the only sound in the curdling stench of blood and scouring. Next, out of the haze, boots pounding like a drum roll. Her voice locked in terror. They were leaving her behind. Even Aaron Richards. Even the dog.

Her teeth juttered in the silence as she slithered down the gulley. Ox blood hung in the air, stiffening on her coat. Suddenly a hand to end it all came stinking on to her face, flattening her nose.
"No need to call out, Miss Snow. Y'll be all right now." The twin who'd crept back from the others tried to hold her close. This ugliest of God's works with the scurvy and breath worse than the pig floor at Nant y Ffin would never touch her again as long as she lived. "Better come with me if you want to get where you're intended." His nails reached her bones like the vermin traps up on the Moel Pregethwr. "We got them all in, thank the Lord. Went sweet as lambs at the end..."

Sweet as lambs.
Eira shivered, plotting furiously how best to escape. The only weapon was her voice, so she set her jaw and took in a great gulp of air. But Aaron Richard's hand was there again.
"Castle Ashby's two days from here. How'll you manage that?"
"I'm not going."
Just past Southam when his eyes had gone straight through her clothes she'd decided to find a return party to take her home. Capability Brown or no Capability Brown, she wasn't going to be a sitting duck in the pretty winter gardens just for his pleasure. She heaved and sicken up.
"Ast brunt!"
The blow sent her to his feet, and once more in the darkness, Death's finger beckoned.
"Aaron?" His twin bellowed. "What you a doin' of? Jones and Lewis here's on their own!"
Eira sensed her captor's indecision. Subservient to his brother who by being married held the Drover's Licence - the upper hand, and on a night such as this, a warm bed. She took the advantage and ran up the lane as Moses' threats continued.
"At Maidford, I'll see you get nothing! And nothing means nothing!"

Her heart like a hammer, Eira waited for the man's next move, but only sighs of the long-dead reached her as she dodged lose stones, the strewn limbs of ash and beech and pools of dung.
At the crossroads to Moreton Pinkney the sign lay broken. Nor was there any moon or stars to set north or tell the time. Was it still night or dawn? Without birdsong who could say? Only those above it all whose vision lay unclouded by matter knew the answer. At least that's what The Wizard of Cwrt y Cadno had said when they'd called in for his rinderpest cure.
How she longed for their gift now, turning as though in a solitary game of Blind Man's Buff, in a strange country with neither coin nor candle to her name. She thought of twp Non Jenkins from Siloh. Sold with the milk near Banbury and found on St.Swithin's day in two forage bags. Better she'd been taken by footpads - at least she'd have had a chance...
Then Eira shut her eyes and for the second time, cocooned in blood and ordure, she huddled by a chump of ivy to sleep.
Fly was limping and whining in turn. He'd slunk away from the men arguing at breakfast as to what had started the stampede, and who should go for the smith in Culworth. At least half the herd needed re-shoeing and most had lost what little condition they'd had. It wasn't until Moses Richards had shaken out his napkin and blown his nose that he realised their one dog had gone.

Too many smells, new distractions, and the brown half-breed instead of keeping straight, took the hidden turning up to Capswell Lodge.

The dowager Lady Dunbarrie felt a draught from outside and something brush her skirts. Being of an affectionate nature she leant forwards to acquaint herself with the visitor, still keeping her considerable weight on her stick.

Fly cowered under her petticoats until he was lifted from his sanctuary and held aloft by a young man dressed more for the city than larks in the country.

"I recognise this little whipster, Mama. He's with those Taffies." Michael Macgregor's grin widened. "Time for a clean up, my friend, and none too soon at that." Still dangling the dog he went through from the kitchen to the scullery where he broke the ice on the bucket with his heel.

His mother heard the pathetic howling and covered her ears, wishing not for the first time she was deaf as well as blind, and wondering out loud why her youngest wasn't bettering himself elsewhere like William up at the locomotive works in Newcastle, or James just qualified as a physician in Edinbugh.

How the male blood thins and sours, she thought, ringing for Agnes to come and stir the fire. Maybe if Michael had come first, and maybe if Lord Dunbarrie had lived they could have stayed in Kirkcudbright and things would have been different...

"Always so many maybes, don't you agree?" To the maid who could never look at her employer's face.

"That's life, innit?"

The dowager's eyeless pinpricks stared in her direction.

"You know my one regret is that I never had a daughter. Someone to fuss over me, to take care of things..."

"So you keep saying, Ma'am."

"Tell me, Agnes," she began, settling herself at the kitchen table, "just what would you advise?"

"You mean, about producing one, Ma'am?" The old Dame was well past anything like that. Barren as the sow strung up in the barn. But Capswell Lodge was full of goings-on. Some too strange for words...

"Whatever."

The old retainer studied the flames then quickly tucked her sixth finger into her palm when she heard Dunbarrie's tread on the flags.

"My grandmother said to eat apples. Red ones, and four a day for the first month..." She babbled.

"Mama, this simpleton talks such utter bunkum," shouted her son from the adjoining scullery. "I don't know why we don't just send her back to her hole in the ground and hire someone whose opinion we can respect."

Agnes Larter scurried out but not before noticing his dirty boots and the wet dog, barely alive at the end of old twine as he dragged it back into the kitchen. He kissed his mother's scented cheek leaving her to fret over the possibility of sparks.

"Training," he lied, "and this Welsh runt had better learn new tricks or he'll be vittles for the hounds."

He kicked its haunches for good measure as the dowager's stick quivered in anger.

"I don't know where you come from, sometimes, Michael MacGregor. Perhaps if I could summon the Devil, he'd tell me."

Her son chose not to hear. Instead let his helpmeet guide him back through the grounded clouds.
Eira woke too quickly and knew she wasn't alone.
"Fly?"
But the stranger hauled him away.
"What sort of name is that, pray? I can think of a dozen better for such a mistake."
"Who are you?"
"Just show me your pockets." The young man from Capswell Lodge squatted beside her. Beer, and the smell of carbine didn't go with the clothes, but he was more handsome than anything her side of the Aust. "You're with the Sennybridge lot aren't you?"
She paused, unsure of his tone. That name where the droves of Blacks and Shorthorns had converged now seemed so far away...
"I might be, I might not."
"A girl with spirit. Hey ho."
"I'm not a girl. I'm a young lady, and sir, you'll do me the honour of addressing me so." Her words surprised her, altering her colour. Even though she'd played Lords and Ladies countless times with her cousins Mair and Owen using stones for cups and bracken for fans, this was different.
"Well if I might enquire of your Ladyship why she's covered in manure with no silver in her hand?"
Eira fell silent with the shame of her filthy clothes, the mess of hair and even as the mist become fog she could see all too vividly the mud walls of Nant y Ffin, the midden, the feeble fire. She unbuttoned her coat and hefted it over into the next field.
"That's better." His fingers took hers. The gentleness of it brought a smile and he thought her exceptionally pretty, unlike the plate-face from Siloh. Just what his Mama had always wanted, but what a pity the old mare would never be able to see her...
They walked arm in arm, with the dog close at heel - the night demons fading as an easy ambience settled on their conversation. Past the great elm swathed in mistletoe where his shot had seen off the herd, back to his secrets and the light still guttering in the window.

About Sally Spedding
Sally was born by the sea near Porthcawl in Wales and trained in sculpture in Manchester and at St Martin’s, London. The dark side of people and landscape. The deceptive exterior, the snake in the grass are all themes which recur in her writing. Her poetry and short stories have won awards and been widely published. She is judging the International Welsh Poetry Competition 2018, and currently putting together her first collection ‘SACRIFICE’ which will be out in early 2019.
Sally is also busy writing ‘FATAL’ book number four in her noir crime series featuring new, young gendarme, Delphine Rougier, set mainly in the Sarthe region of France.

For more of Sally’s books visit: http://www.sallyspedding.com
All our author’s books are available from: http://www.talesfromwales.net/bookshop.htm
John Hurst

Winter in Powys
In the Usk Valley
Cwm Llanwenarth
Winter Trees

http://www.abergavennyartists.co.uk/hurst.html
Miss Eleanor Harris, Head of Middle School and teacher of Religious Studies at Wood End Comprehensive School, gazes out of her study window on the school's third floor, which gives her an uninterrupted aerial view of the school's tennis courts and ramshackle bicycle-sheds.

The late autumnal day is cold and grey. Leaves hang like limp flags from the dull clump of trees that form the school's natural boundary and which gives the school its name, but the combined greyness of sky and concrete yard is broken by maroon uniform-clad Lowryesque figures below, which radiate ever-changing patterns, as if they are pieces being shaken within a gigantic kaleidoscope. It's always the same, muses Miss Harris, the clusters of pupils talking animatedly are always the girls and the bodies hurtling around, pushing, pummelling and yelling are invariably the boys.

Suddenly, the piercing shrill of the electric bell signalling morning registration causes a temporary silence and an unnatural freezing of movement, but by the third blast, bunches of excited, shouting teenagers mob the entrance doors to the school, where the teacher on duty makes a half-hearted attempt to assert control and order. Just like Pavlov's dogs, thinks Miss Harris. Every day potential anarchy looms in every school, kept dormant only by a collective response to timed bells.

From her window, Miss Harris sees and hears Doug King, a member of the Physical Education Department and form teacher of the notorious Form 10X, lumbering complainingly onto cloakroom duty, his leg muscles stretching taut his green nylon and lycra tracksuit bottoms, his bulging calves and thighs like two pods of broad beans, his beer belly overlapping the waistband.

He struggles, visibly, to reason with the cheeky, chattering bodies his fingers itch to pinch and prod into submission with the tactics he uses in the scrum every Saturday. The boys know he is on a permanent short fuse, so they compete to rile him, egging on 'King Kong' (as they call him out of ear-shot), to rattle the cage bars, taunting his muscle-bound brain with a cunning mixture of gestural and silent defiance.
"Come on now, single file. You know the rules," he shouts, expecting to be ignored. He recognises a smiling face bobbing past him and bellows in an ear, "I hear you scored a blinder on Saturday, Richards. Well done!" He turns to face the anonymous blur of faces.

"Stop pushing and you'll get in faster!" he yells.

A minor deviation in someone's uniform hits him in the practised eye like a pellet from a catapult. He waves his arms.

"Hey, you! Yes, you! Come back here!"

A youth fights against the tide of heaving bodies to return to Doug King's side.

"I might have known it was you, Mann!"

"What sir? What have I done, sir?"

Pupils giggle as they push past.

"Dave Mann? More like Cave-Man." Doug King leers at his own wit. Miss Harris watches the boy flinch as Doug King's guffaw sends gusts of pure nicotine fumes into his face. "You're trying to wind me up, boy, aren't you? Go on, admit it."

"No, sir."

More giggles.

"Well, what do you think you're doing coming to school in that?" He stares goggle-eyed at the offending garment.

Dave Mann affects a look of innocence. "In what, sir?"

Bristles rise on the back of Doug King's short, thick neck.

"Never mind, 'What, sir?' You know what." He prods an inch of contrast colour on the boy's chest with a knobbly finger. "No logos allowed on school sweaters."

There's an eyeball-to-eyeball moment of crisis.

"My school sweater's in the wash, sir."

"You've had the whole weekend to get it washed."

"The washing machine broke down, sir. Nothing we could do."

"Well you can't wear that one around school, or we'll have an outbreak of designer labels appearing. What do you think this is, a cat-walk? Take it off!"

"It's too cold, sir, and the radiators don't work in half the classrooms anyway."

Doug King thinks back to his invigilation of an 'A' Level re-sit examination held in a requisitioned Portakabin the previous week, when he'd been forced to drape himself, physically, along a radiator, just to keep his circulation going. He'd had no idea how the examinees had been able to control their frozen hands to write. He concedes, silently, that the boy, undoubted nerd that he is, has a valid point.

No more bodies push past. Heavy, shoe-scuffed outer swing-doors clash shut. Doug King consults his watch and decides to pursue a quick cup of coffee in preference to a dubious, protracted victory over logos. He knocks the power-ritual defensively into touch by insisting upon the last word.

"Well, I haven't got time to deal with you. Report to Miss Harris. Tell her Mr King sent you."

Dave Mann manages to look suitably demure. With a bit of luck, looking for Miss Harris might mean missing Assembly in the Main Hall, a twice-weekly pain in the groin.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go on then. Move!"

Doug King sprints the steps leading to the first-floor staff-room, while Dave Mann, smiling knowingly, moves leisurely across the yard under Miss Harris's window. From experience she is able to trace the youth's movements, and even time, within seconds, his knocking at her door. He'll dawdle, probably visit the toilet on the first floor, where he'll smoke half a cigarette, before climbing the final stairs to her room. There he'll pause to adopt an injured expression, catch his breath, then knock at her door.
Miss Harris looks at the door, imagining the grubby fist curling the other side preparing to thump it soundly. Instead, her telephone rings. She lifts the receiver. A voice rasps. It’s the man she still refers to as ‘the new Headmaster’, though he is now into his fourth term at the school. She senses from the strained civility of the tone and the forced friendliness that he is not alone; he is playing to the gallery, acting casual and controlled to impress his audience. His voice is oily with effort.

“Ah, Eleanor?”

Her own name spoken by an enemy does not belong to her. It warrants no response. “Eleanor, are you there?” The tone has become, already, a little impatient. She is tempted to join in the charade by replying, “No,” but she does not know who is with him and she decides to play safe.

She jumps. “Yes, sorry! I think there is someone at my door waiting to see me.”

“Well, I won’t keep you a minute. I just wanted to tell you that I’ll be bringing a visitor into your Assembly this morning.”

She senses a trick. She feels an involuntary chill. “My Assembly?”

She is confused but she remains calm, then she peers myopically at her notice board and runs her finger horizontally along the day’s duty roster. She sees written in bold type: Monday, November 10th Assembly in Main Hall. Years 8 -10: Miss Harris.

Her finger touches the caked correcting-fluid proud on the surface of the roster. She realises, with sinking spirits, that the list has been altered since she last checked it at Friday lunch time, and that only one person in the school has the motive and the power to risk that type of intimidation. She wonders what they do in other places, when it’s suspected that the biggest school bully is the Headmaster.

“The visitor is Mr Crawford, our newly designated H.M.I. He doesn’t begin his official duties until after Christmas, but he’s raring to get to know us. He has a special responsibility for School Assemblies, and I think he’ll enjoy one of your classics. We’ll be down in about ten minutes.”

She knows he is smirking now, sensing his own triumph and her blind panic at having to face three hundred bored teenagers, a dozen critical teachers and an expectant government inspector with absolutely nothing to say.

The telephone goes dead. There’s a knock at her door and, at her command, Dave Mann sidles his way in insolently. He blurts out his message, while her eyes scan him from head to foot. The logo stitched on the left side of the sweater is innocuous. Nevertheless, school uniform rules are non-negotiable. She tells the youth, quite calmly, that he has a choice of either removing the sweater immediately, or of being sent home with a letter for his parents, reminding them of the contract they entered into when they applied for their son to be admitted as a pupil at Wood End.

Dave Mann is taken aback. She hasn’t remonstrated, reprimanded, or threatened. She has merely stated her intention to involve his parents. He doesn’t think it’s fair. He reckons she’s not playing the game. Problems in school end nebulously, every day on the final bell; those taken home fester, create multiple inconveniences and repercussions, like cuts in pocket money, late night curfews, a ban on weekend stop-overs at friends’ houses. He wants to provoke an argument with this old bat, who doesn’t play according to the book, but her face has closed. He does not realise how fast and furiously her brain is working at survival, so he misinterprets her set facial expression. He concedes defeat, tugs off his sweater, which he throws defiantly at her feet, and storms out of the room and down the stairs. He feels justified in skipping Assembly in favour of having a smoke.
Another bell signals the movement of classes to the Main Hall for Assembly. Miss Harris walks down two flights of stairs, as if in a dream, and crosses the wind-swept yard towards the main entrance, where rows of maroon figures inch forward like giant arteries pumping life into the grey building. She sees the gowned Headmaster standing with his guest, ready to sweep majestically into the hall to witness her humiliation. The two men, although only recently introduced, chat animatedly like old friends, so they do not see her dithering nervously. Suddenly, instinctively, she knows what to do.

She strides confidently into the ground-floor cloakroom area. She often makes random forays into little-known, dusty alcoves there, catching smokers hiding in toilets hoping to dodge Assemblies. On one occasion, she had startled a pick-pocket riffling through the hanging outer coats, her hands full of money. Another time, she had caught two Year 11 pupils discovering sex, uncomfortably, on a pile of lost-property clothing dumped in a corner. Her presence there today excites no particular interest.

She checks there is no one in sight, then she positions herself close to the wall from which protrudes a domed, glass panel covering a fire-alarm. She removes her shoe, hits the glass with force and watches it shatter. Louder, even than the pounding of her own heartbeat, soars the strident scream of the fire-bell. There is a cheer from bolder pupils who sense a prankster at work, then the flow of maroon bodies gushes from the Main Hall like an enormous haemorrhage, out onto the tennis courts, the designated assembly point for all school fire drills. Miss Harris joins the mass of pupils filing out, and begins disciplining them, because they are noisy and boisterous, thrilled, as she herself is, at having avoided the ordeal of her Assembly. Everyone assumes the fire bell is a hoax. Now begins the search for the culprit. An example must be made. A breach of discipline and safety must be punished. Form teachers bustle officiously up and down rows of pupils, consulting class registers and checking class numbers. Only one pupil is found to be missing: Dave Mann.

“Typical! Bloody typical!” moans Doug King, his form-master, predicting hours of police-type investigations ahead.

The roll call complete, files of maroon clad figures are allowed back into the building for the start of morning lessons. Miss Harris catches up with the new Headmaster and the H.M.I. as she seeks the sanctuary of her own room. She overhears the H.M.I. speaking heatedly to the Headmaster, criticising the low efficiency of the drill and the faulty evacuation procedures. She hears snatches of sentences: “dangerously slow reaction”, “lack of discipline” and “need to report this to the Office, when I get back.” He breaks off the harangue to acknowledge Miss Harris, as she passes. He seems genuinely disappointed to have missed her Assembly and tells her kindly that he will find an early opportunity to revisit the school to get to know her better.

He sees the bright eyes and nervous smile of the faded woman in front of him and he feels genuinely sorry that some mindless prankster has robbed her of a chance to impress him with a well-prepared moral message. The Headmaster looks ruffled; his lips are pursed in disappointment, but he lacks the imagination to suspect her. Miss Harris feels for the first time in her life the thrill of lawlessness and, as she collides in a corridor with Dave Mann, shivering in his shirt-sleeves, being frog-marched for questioning by the scowling Doug King, she gives the lad what he could have sworn was a furtive wink.
Katherine Jordan
Sugar Loaf View
Miner's Houses
Brecon View
Harbour View
Beachscape

http://www.abergavennyartists.co.uk/jordan.html
The First Date... 
Has Roxy's dating app come up trumps this time?

Sunday

1.55 P.M.
I am sat in Brian's car, parked outside the garden centre, awaiting my new date, Derek. It was my idea for the date to be at the garden centre. A decision that I am now regretting as Derek is a gardener and I struggle with growing watercress.

To secure the date I did tell a small white lie. In my email I told him that I was mad about flowers and plants. The truth is I am useless at gardening and kill off plants as opposed to growing them.

Brian has kindly offered to drop me off and collect me later. He says he worries about me meeting strange men off the Internet in garden centres.

Every so often Brian likes to give me his views on how I should approach life. He enjoys being a father figure to me, as well as my landlord and my ‘emotional rock’.

Today’s lecture is all about self-control. He is urging me to have some self-control on this first date and not get carried away with my emotions.
According to him, his wife Patricia possessed a good level of self-control for many months after they started courting.

I promise Brian that I won’t get carried away. I remind him of the following points:

• I am a thirty something single mother of three kids and not some lovesick teenager.

• The date is at a garden centre and not some nightclub. It’s an alcohol free date – what could happen over a latte and a tray of bulbs?

• I have very high standards when it comes to first dates.

• I am in full control of my emotions.

Brian turns to look out of his window and I can hear him muttering something.

1.58 P.M. Check my first date outfit.

In the end (after 5 clothing changes) I opted for a classic white shirt, a pair of smart blue jeans and some black ballet pumps.

Check my ‘natural looking but heavily made up’ makeup using my diamanté compact mirror.

My red hair looks sleek, shiny and neat. There is not a strand out-of-place.

1.59 P.M. Douse myself with perfume in the car which sends Brian into a huge wheezy coughing fit.

2.01 P.M. Greet Derek outside the Garden Centre.

Enter shock mode – in the dating app photo Derek looked handsome, in real life he is stunning!

Stand with mouth open and shake my head in amazement at the beautiful sight of Derek.

My dating app has come up trumps this time. The expensive subscription fee that sent me overdrawn was worth it.

Marvel at the size of his spade like hands and stare into his dazzling blue eyes.

Love his date outfit, blue and white checked shirt, jeans and smart boots.

Get heady rush from his spicy aftershave.

2.03 P.M. Head for café inside garden centre. Derek doesn’t say much as we stand in the queue.

I order a latte and he orders an espresso.

2.05 P.M. Find table and sit down opposite each other. Silence. Wonder whether Derek is shy?

2.10 P.M. Still staring at each other in silence.

2.20 P.M. He doesn’t talk much.

In view of his amazing looks I make the decision to ignore his lack of conversation making abilities.

Continue to gaze into his dazzling blue eyes.
231 P.M. Pay for coffee and wander into the Houseplants section of the garden centre.

233 P.M. We are both stood looking at some plants.

I am struggling to think of something intelligent to say. My gardening lie is coming back to haunt me.

All I can manage is a finger point and "colourful!"

Try to remember the name of at least one plant for when we are making couple small talk.

235 P.M. Wander into the Trees and Plants section.

Derek remains silent and takes hold of my hand. My body is tingling with excitement. In all my years on this planet I have never walked hand in hand around a garden centre with someone so handsome.

We look like a beautiful couple who share an interest in flowers and stuff but don't need to talk to each other.

Decide that conversation on a date is overrated and unnecessary.

237 P.M. Things develop further by some ornamental trees. After staring at the trees we turn to look at each other. I find myself wanting to kiss him.

We embrace and engage in a kiss on the lips. I am rewarded with an added extra – he runs his large hands through my hair.

I am so glad I practiced kissing the back of my hand before this date.

Derek's kissing technique is amazing. Gentle and sensual.

Much better than my ex-partner Rob's 'washing machine mouth' kissing approach.

239 P.M. Wander into the Ornaments, Pots & Water Features.

Point at some terracotta pots with patterns on them.

Try to think of something intelligent to say about the plants inside them. Words fail me. Give up and enjoy another long kiss with Derek.

As we both surface for air my mind runs through the benefits of marrying someone who doesn't say much:

1. He will never nag me about the state of the house.

2. He will not bore me with his views on current affairs.

3. He will just concentrate on looking good for me.

4. I can do the talking for the both of us.

243 P.M. Get carried away with the idea of having a beautiful and silent husband who enjoys kissing me.

I am now kissing Derek so much that I am starting to feel dizzy, due to a lack of oxygen.

244 P.M. Feel hot, flushed and a bit wobbly on my feet. Derek is making me feel like I am a teenager again. I am losing control.
245 P.M. Find a bench to sit on, near a large water feature. When Derek is looking the other way I stick my face into the spray from the water feature to cool down.

Wonder how my makeup is doing. Derek hasn’t commented on it. Assume that it survived the kissing and water feature spray.

256 P.M. Try to start stimulating conversation with Derek.

“So Derek do you enjoy gardening?”

“Yea!”

“Do you live locally?”

“Yea!”

“Do you go out much on an evening?”

“Yea!”

259 P.M. Give up talking. Derek is clearly a man of few words.

Consider the fact that Derek might be only good for one thing.

3.10 P.M. Suggest we get another drink as my lips feel numb after all that kissing.

3.15 P.M. Sit in silence with our respective coffees.

3.17 P.M. Derek speaks. He says “you're gorgeous!”

In shock at hearing him speak I accidentally tip my coffee cup into my lap.

3.20 P.M. The coffee clean up operation involves a miserable woman from behind the counter and some cloths.

Stare in horror at massive wet patch on the front of my jeans.

3.22 P.M. Phone bleeps. It’s a loving text from Matilda. She hates me for making her spend time with her father and is annoyed he won’t buy her a leather mini skirt.

3.25 P.M. Receive text from Rob (ex-partner) to say that Harry (our son) fell into a tropical fish tank after messing about in his tropical fish shop. Harry’s fine but Rob’s girlfriend has had to go lie down in a darkened room.

3.27 P.M. Go back into garden centre with huge wet patch on jeans.

Derek’s lack of conversation plays on my mind. Make several attempts to have conversation with Derek. He seems content with just grinning at me and saying ‘yea’.

I am not sure I can date someone who doesn’t talk much or have a laugh with me.

Decide to enjoy what time I have left with Derek. His hands go a bit crazy in my hair.

4.00 P.M. Stagger out of garden centre looking flushed, dishevelled and modelling a bird’s nest hairstyle plus a large wet patch on my jeans.
Get into Brian's car and wave goodbye to Derek for the final time.

Turn to smile at Brian, whilst reaching for my phone to text my best mate Shaz.

Brian takes one look at me and groans loudly.

Text to Shaz:

‘Derek is hot to look at but doesn’t say much. He’s a good kisser and that’s it. I want conversation. I won’t be taking things further. Thoughts?’

Text reply from Shaz:

‘Give him my mobile number. He sounds like my perfect man’
"Mister Author, why are you Blogging so much when you ‘should’ be Writing?..."

Seumas Gallacher was born in the cradle of the Govan shipyards in Glasgow in the so-called 'bad old days', which Seumas considers were really the greatest of days, where everybody was a true character of note.

An early career as a trainee banker led to a spell in London, where his pretence to be a missionary converting the English fell on deaf ears.

Escape to the Far East in 1980 opened up access to cultures and societies on a global scale, eventually bringing the realisation that the world is simply one large, extended village.

The lifelong desire to write resulted in THE VIOLIN MAN’S LEGACY, the first in a planned series. Seumas’ sequel novel, VENGEANCE WEARS BLACK was launched in early July 2012. The third, SAVAGE PAYBACK, was released in late 2013. Ebook downloads on his novels exceed 70,000 to date.

Seumas is a committed blogger and in his guest article he explains why.
"...Mister Author, why are you Blogging so much when you ‘should’ be Writing?...

...there’s a teasing wee topic headline for yeez, eh?... I don’t expect to split the literary WURLD opinion down the middle with it... nor create too much disharmony in the Quill-Scrapers Society... however, let me ‘fess up... I have a kinda LUV/LUV relationship with the whole nine yards of the writing ‘business’... like most of us, its genesis is in the thought process prior to even scribbling or laptop-tapping a single WURD of the masterpiece all the way through the tracking of Amazon Kindle sales figures after the baby’s launched... in between, yeez have the actual writing, the editing, the more editing, the proof reading, the creating-the-cover-art bit, the boxing into Kindle format or whatever your publishing channel poison of choice may be, and over-arching all of that is the marketing and publicity effort, which is constant... yeez are almost mandated these days as a self-publisher to immerse yerselves in the SOSYAL NETWURKIN whirl... yeez Tweet and ReTweet until yer fingers are falling off... yeez share like billy-o on Facebook, trying all the while to avoid Master Zuckenberg’s Jail sentences for being too friendly with yer kindred Webbies... yeez build up trillions of Goodreads Brownie Points for indulgence in myriad ‘readers interest groups’... and with whatever’s left of yer brain time, yeez sprinkle around in other assorted linkages... presence, Mabel... it’s about presence... this is where the Blogging becomes the master-key... the elusive missing bit of the jigsaw... this ol’ Jurassic happens to use Wordpress to host the blogging website... and it must be said, at first it was because Wordpress is free... and being a true-tartan-bloodied Scot, the not-having-to-pay-element was a prime attraction... then, as time wore on, lo and behold, I was able automatically to connect every blog post to all my major SOSYAL NETWURKS... from direct contacts of a mere 200 souls two and a half years ago, the other assorted linkages... presence, Mabel... it’s about presence... this is where the Blogging becomes the master-key... the elusive missing bit of the jigsaw... this ol’ Jurassic happens to use Wordpress to host the blogging website... and it must be said, at first it was because Wordpress is free... and being a true-tartan-bloodied Scot, the not-having-to-pay-element was a prime attraction... then, as time wore on, lo and behold, I was able automatically to connect every blog post to all my major SOSYAL NETWURKS... from direct contacts of a mere 200 souls two and a half years ago, the direct base has grown to 14,500+... not a bad reason to Blog... and the more yeez Blog, the more ye’re reaching out to yer global markets... but, wait... there’s more to it than that... reaching out is one thing, but aren’t yeez supposed to be writing?... well, yes... in the interim I’ve produced three crime thrillers and two Blog Post anthologies/collections... and so far Amazon downloads exceed 70,000 to date... not much wrong with these numbers... the attractions in producing the Blog continue... the crime thriller scribbling can be quite intense... the little grey cells get hammered incessantly... the attempted humour in the Blog is a healthy distaff to that... and what’s developed?... the novels contain my ‘Author’s Voice’... but the Blog carries my ‘Author’s Brand’... and finally, don’t let emb’dy ever tell yeez that Blogging isn’t writing... condensing yer thoughts into a limited amount of WURDS is great practice... go try it... yeez’ll LUV IT...

"
Wales Across the World

That Man

At 18 he was called up to defend the King and Realm,
There really wasn't any choice with Hitler at the helm.
That man wanted the Airforce, but he failed the test at maths.
Algebra defeats me still, genetic then perhaps.
So, to the army he was called, South Staffs his regiment
And to the depths of Burma 'gainst the Japanese was sent.
Six months of active service, in the jungle and monsoons
To fight among the Chindits, but then one day far too soon
A Jap grenade exploded, just behind that man.
All he knew was he fell forward, and didn't know the harm
That blast had caused, as he's carried on a litter cross a hill.
A shot rang out, the carriers fled, and he was left there till,
A squad of yanks, they found him, took him to a village that
Had a makeshift runway nearby, just made from coconut mat.
That night the Japanese sent firebombs that village's way.
That man was in the only hut that wasn't hit that day.
So, flown to evac hospital, a tenuous hold on life,
In pain and struggling to survive the horror and the strife.
At night they said that man will not be here to see the dawn
For months they said each morning that his hopes of life are none.
That man, he proved them wrong, and fought with all his heart and soul
To make it home to Wales and live, for that was just his goal.
That man was such a hero, never thought his fate was sealed
And the fight he fought was hard, the injuries that never healed
But fight he did and on and on and I am just so glad
That that man who had fought so hard, was the man I called my Dad.

Melanie Peet

Delighted to say we have another contribution from Australia plus one from their Antipodean neighbours New Zealand.

Tony Berry recounts his determined search for his Welsh roots.

Melanie Peet's contribution is a poem about an exceptional man - her father.
Coming Home to Combs
by
Tony Berry

Researching family history is a minefield for the novice and the unprepared. This lesson was quickly learned with my first foray into searching archives in the hope of finding clues to my lately discovered Welsh ancestry. To contact any Public Records Office or similar repository and merely state you are researching the Smith family will get you nowhere in a long time. However, there is every prospect of achieving a result by saying you are tracing the marriage of a John Smith from such and such a parish around about 1815. Names, places and dates are vital signposts. Old handwritten documents will be speedily produced, and you will be directed where next to look in your research.

It was a huge step into the unknown (think Cook in Botany Bay, Fawcett in the Amazon) when, accompanied by recently discovered cousin Lynne, I ventured through walls of Haverfordwest Castle and into the serene surrounds of the Pembrokeshire Record Office. It took the best part of a day to come to grips with what was available, how to access it, ways of recording it (pencils only for written notes, cameras within reason, fees for copying) and settling into the overall rhythm of this storehouse of treasured information.

By the second day, thanks to a patient and helpful staff who enjoy unravelling mysteries as much as those of who present them, we were almost old hands. Our two mornings had produced marriage certificates, two wills made in the 1780s, details of family donations to a village school, an invaluable map and the revelation of a coroner’s report into a family member’s death of which we had no previous knowledge. The coroner’s report provided evidence that my family had lived at an address in Pembroke Dock some thirty years earlier than previously thought. We were off and running like foxhounds finding a new scent. There were streets to explore, houses to find and mysteries to solve.

Chief among the latter was the whereabouts of the village of Combs where I now knew my great-great-grandparents had lived at least from the time of the first official census in 1841. Although records showed Combs had existed at least since the medieval era, at some time over the past hundred years or so it seemed to have been wiped off the map.

It definitely existed in the censuses of 1841 and 1851 when William John Berry, his wife Ann and their ten children were recorded as living ‘in the last house in the village of Combs’.

It was a community of fewer than fifty people living within the parish of Steynton, a strip of land six miles from north to south and no more than two miles from east to west yet, in the 1830s, it was home to some 3000 people. Many of these, however, lived in the borough of Milford, the seaport and market town on the shores of Milford Haven, which formed the parish’s southern boundary. A tidal inlet, the Hubberton Pill, provided access to Combs at high tide for small craft. Although largely agricultural, the parish also contained deposits of culm that were extracted at a mine on Lord Kensington’s estate and provided the district’s needs for cheap fuel. Combs was still there in 1880, according to a map of Pembrokeshire (sheet XXXIII.14) produced by archivists in the Public Record Office. But not even their willing determination could produce any references more recent than that. After a painstaking trawl through the archives all hopes seemed dashed of retracing my forebears’ footsteps among the farmhouses and cottages of Combs.
Searches proved the village once existed along the creeks flowing inland from the vast waterway that is Milford Harbour. Now it is no more: vanished, gone without a trace. Neither the intensely detailed Ordnance Survey maps nor the usually reliable Google maps recognised its existence.

Then, two days into a tour of the area, came one of those Eureka moments that keep family historians plugging away. In a tourist guide to Milford Haven, picked up when rifling through a rack of brochures in the hotel foyer, was that elusive name: Coombs – surely its only inclusion on a modern map. And it was precisely where I believed it should have been. However, it was simply a word in an otherwise blank space, unconnected to any roads, as if the artist felt the need to put something there.

All roads may very well lead to Rome, but I had found none that led to Coombs. As if in testimony to the past there was, however, a Coombs Road turning off the main route from the medieval community of Steynton (where my folks later lived) to the modern harbour port of Milford Haven that later subsumed it. We found this Coombs Road to be little more than a country lane. It plunges and twists its way down to the muddy and tidal Pill Creek before hair-pinning up the other side to Venn Farm and Castle Hall, which were both prominent on maps of John Berry’s time. A minor industrial estate now stands where a vineyard once struggled for existence in a climate hardly conducive to viticulture. A quarry and lime kilns have become nothing more than landmarks on old maps.

A few clicks of the millimeter past Venn Farm one of those ubiquitous walking man signs indicated a footpath heading off to the left in the direction of the woods and Pill Creek. To this seeker of the past, however, this was no ordinary sign. It was, in the fullest, almost biblical, sense a pointer to our holy grail. A rough narrow trail between fenced-off farm meadows, descended gradually towards the thickly wooded slopes bordering the creek. On either side were the remnants of solidly thick stone walls barely discernible beneath masses of brambles and undergrowth. Someone once lived here.

The final few metres sloped steeply down then broadened out to a gravelly creek bed. A lively stream flowed from dense woods climbing the hill on the right, rippling over a ford and on into the creek. The view to the left opened out, the creek widening into a broad expanse of mudflats and minor streams rimmed by wooded hillsides.

I was home! This was where my direct ancestors lived; the wellspring and source of the many Berrys that followed. This was where great-great-grandfather John Berry and his family lived, as the 1841 census described it, “in the last house in the village.” Somewhere up to the right, among the tree-covered slopes and overlooking the bend in the creek, was as far back as I could trace my existence. A light breeze ruffled the branches. A weak September sun dappled the water. It was such a peaceful and almost hidden corner of this troubled and angry world. I stood there in total silence, close to tears.

The emotion-fuelled walk back to Coombs Road set me on the next stage of long and winding trail that eventually resulted in the publication of From Paupers to iPads, a semi-fictionalised history of the Berry family. But with the explosion of family history resources on the internet I soon learnt there was so much more to be unveiled about my hitherto unknown Welsh heritage. Among them is a connection between the vanished Welsh community of Coombs and very recently discovered Celtic kinfolk in that other ancient land embraced by wild ocean shores - Cornwall.

And so a greatly revised and expanded sequel to Paupers is now a work very much in progress ... provided I don't get distracted and lost among the now thick foliage of the family tree.
Mary James

The Afon Llwyd
Cafe Culture
http://www.abergavennyartists.co.uk/maryjames.html
About Terry Victor

Terry is a regular on BBC 5 Live’s Up All Night “Grammar Phone-in” with Dotun Adebayo. He’s a frequent contributor across the BBC Radio network.


For more on that or links to work as an actor and writer
http://terryvictor.co.ukxt
To quote Hot Chocolate, the most perfectly named, sweet and smooth and sexy pop band of my younger years: “It started with a kiss…” Yep. This was way back when: then I was in my lip-smacking lip-locking prime, I must remember this, way back then when I was rarely tongue-tied. Life was more full-on snog than social peck back then. I was a Love Gun who could Rock and Roll All Nite. Nary an air kiss to blight the blue skies of a rose-tinted golden age.

Play it again, Sam (a misquotation, I know): “You must remember this / A kiss is just a kiss…” Oh, I remember that mouth music. I really do. You played it for her, now play it for me.

Growing up my renewable supply of social hugs and kisses on the cheek was strictly reserved for a hierarchy of aunties, ‘aunties’, and grans. In the main I tried not to reciprocate. I was a boy. I suffered being kissed by nicotiney, lipsticky, hard-pressed lips. My mum always said, “Kiss your Gran,” but she was generous with her kisses and her hugs, at least as far as I was concerned.

As time went by, and despite the appetites of adolescence, greetings were still conventional, somewhat formal. Man to woman (my POV) the aspirational handshake was soft and gentle. Man to man, a firm grip was to be admired. These were the handshake days of yore when the limp and sweaty approximation was much despised or derided.

Now, oh brave new world, here we are: greeting each other in this bravely hugging, cheek-kissing, newly gender-blind (gender-curious?) – is-it-PC? – social grind. I have lately been mwwahed so I thought I might pucker up and tender a select glossary of kiss-related words & merely tangential items of osculatory interest. What? WTAF? Oh, and because I have been working on A Dictionary of English Rhyming Slangs for the last few years there’s quite a bit of that stuff in here too. Now read on...

Let’s start with the basics. A kiss is so many things to so many people but it’s not the easiest thing to define.

A kiss is a noun. To kiss is a verb. Kissing is fantastic. You know this stuff.
Kissing is the act of touching with your lips.
A kiss may be neutral, caring, hot or cold.
A kiss may welcome a new born baby or invite the process that leads to a new born baby.
A kiss is instinctively calibrated with degrees of heat and enthusiasm.
A kiss has the power to express innocent love and hungry desire.
A kiss is an invitation and a sexual caress.
A kiss has the subtlety to express the difference between greeting and foreplay.
A kiss may aver a respectful farewell or avow ardent commitment.
A kiss might be no more than a fleeting moment of conventional contact.
A kiss is a highly nuanced form of personal communication.
A kiss may linger.

X: A kiss may be pressed but not always welcomed.
X: Some people practice on their hands.
X: kiss their pets.

X: The Hot Chocolate kiss was in the back row of the classroom. Back in 1982.

---

**air kiss**

This ritualised kiss is quite the perfect way to avoid inappropriate levels of intimacy. Simply purse or pucker in the general direction of an intended kissee (or, often, kisseees) and, with what feels to you like the right degree of extravagance or faux-sincerity, lip-smack the air. For pretenders and propagandists there really is no finer way to socialise.

X: It is perfectly possible to air kiss whilst in cheek-to-cheek contact with the intended recipient of your largesse.

X: The intimate noises of empty kisses may be masked with a mellifluous cacophony of mwahs.
blow a kiss

To kiss your fingertips and blow that kiss where you will. It is also possible to dispense with fingers altogether in these affectionate transactions: you can simply kiss ‘n’ blow without slipping into the air kiss category. It just takes a little practice.

X: Coming in at 1611 blow a kiss has greater and far more English history than air kiss which is first recorded in Chicago in 1887. So air kissing might just be too unorthodox for traditionalists who disdain Americanisms.

buss

In the mid 16th Century if you had a fancy for a vigorous kiss then buss might serve your needs, both verb and noun. Nowadays, nearly 400 years later, some folk still buss a bit but nowhere near as often.

butterfly kiss

This is a kiss for which no lips or lepidopterists are required. A butterfly kiss is an intimate caress with fluttering eyelashes, an actively affectionate or flirtatious brushing by one of another’s cheek.

OK. I shan’t mention the dictionary again. Honest. Mwahahaha!

cuddle and kiss

A young woman. A cuddle and kiss is rhyming slang for ‘miss’ not necessarily a statement of intent. Use with caution.

cuddled and kissed

Rhyming slang for ‘pissed’, drunk.

double kiss

Right cheek, then left: as a greeting. According to Debrett’s advice on the etiquette of social kissing, the double kiss “is not appropriate in many professional situations”. Use with caution.
Eskimo kiss

A kiss for which lips are superfluous. This time your nose is the active facial feature. An Eskimo kiss is the deliberate touching of nose tips (not an accidental bumping while lips are seeking contact). A practice apparently based on a misinterpreted grain drawn from an Inuit truth.

first base

Mouth on mouth kissing. From a primarily American and necessarily vague code of measurement that uses baseball as a sexual metaphor. Shared with the world via American high school movies and other US teen culture.

X: Second base denotes the touching or, better yet, kissing of breasts; third base involves fondling or, better yet, kissing the genitals; fourth base – the home run – is the grand achievement of sexual intercourse (and at least one happy teen). Strike out and you don’t even get to first base.

French kiss

A greeting in which a kiss is given to both cheeks. The term derives as an observation of French behaviour. It’s also rhyming slang for ‘piss’.

French kiss; French; Frenchy

A mouth to mouth kiss in which tongues are engaged. The term derives as a presumption of French behaviour. Until 2014 the French did not have a popular dictionary word for it: they just got on with it. A ‘galoche’ (French kiss) has been recorded as slang since the mid-1970s. Now, however, it’s official; and long may they ‘galocher’.

X: I cannot speak the language, but I can kiss in the tongue...

Glasgow kiss

Face to face action in the form of a headbutt: a forehead to nose collision of violent intent. In practice much the same as a Liverpool kiss but decades later in coinage.

gypsy’s kiss; gypsy’s

This is rhyming slang for ‘piss’. Kiss gets used a lot as the rhyme for ‘piss’. I could have also chosen angel’s kiss, French kiss, goodnight kiss or several others but right now I am in need of a gypsy’s, and it looks like it's going to gypsy's kiss down which would gypsy's kiss me off, so no time to hang about.
hand kissing

The action of kissing the back of another’s hand as a courteous gesture that may evidence, by circumstance rather than degree, admiration, allegiance, gallantry, politeness or regard. Hand kissing may also be derided as archaically quaint and unnecessarily chivalrous or served up as a prank.

heavenly bliss

A rhyming slang kiss. Aspirational.

Hector’s pecking

Rhyming slang for necking, which is rather more than just pecking.

hit and miss

Another rhyming slang kiss, this one comes with tempered expectations.

Keep It Simple, Stupid

A design principle further simplified in the acronym KISS. With pleasing symmetry, the KISS principle may be applied to the process of kissing. Try it.

Kermit the Frog

Rhyming slang for snog.

X: Celebrity Muppet and Miss Piggy snogger Kermit the Frog actually has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

KISS

A made-up and costumed rock band from America, formed in 1973 by the Starchild, the Demon, Space Ace, and the Catman. KISS was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2013.

kiss and cuddle

Rhyming slang for muddle. One thing leads to another.
kiss and make up

To restore friendly relations. Nothing to do with KISS.

kiss and tell

To indiscreetly recount details of your sexual encounters; to kiss and sell the story of an intimate relationship with someone who is, by some accounts, a celebrity. NB: safe sex is remembering to sign that NDA before foreplay gets underway. Verb, noun, adjective and bloody annoying.

kiss arse

To suck up to someone; to toady. A British verb for the activity of ‘arse-kissers’.

kiss-ass

Sycophantic, obsequious, oleaginous. An American adjective for the activity of ‘ass-kisser

kiss better

To console and cure an ill or injured person, especially a young ‘un, by anointing with the best medicine known to man – the application of a kiss (or, better yet, kisses) to an area of discomfort or injury. To kiss better is to offer so much more than a mere placebo ever can.

kiss cam

An historic American sporting tradition from the 1980s, intended to fill gaps in baseball action and coverage. A broadcast camera – the ‘kiss cam’ – selects a random couple in the stadium crowd and displays their (expected) show of affection on the big screen and, often, to the viewers at home. If the game is slow, at least someone is getting to first base.

kiss chase

A playground game, from ‘more innocent times’, that normalised predatory behaviour. Once captured, the fancied prey is subjected to a kiss from whoever is ‘it’. Seconds away, round two.

X: A kiss is the price paid for a special delivery in the game of Postman's Knock.
kiss curl

A decorative curl of hair that, subjected to spit or product, lies flat against the forehead; to the side of the cheek; in front of the ear; or on the nape of the neck. Does a kiss curl enhance the kissability of the adorned?

kiss something goodbye

To reluctantly give something up. You may have wished for an unsplit infinitive in the last sentence. Well, you can kiss that goodbye.

KISS FM UK / KISS RADIO

‘The Beat of the UK’, if you can believe your streaming ears.

Kiss me, Hardy

Rhyming slang for Bacardi rum. Mine’s a kiss me and coke, cheers.

X: “Kiss me, Hardy,” are the alleged last words of Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar. It’s a lovely story. Far more likely that the dying admiral said, “Kismet, Hardy”. Hardy was flag captain to Admiral Lord Nelson. Kismet is fate.

Kiss Me Kate

Rhyming slang for a romantic date. Not exclusive to Kates, Katherines or Kitties.

X: Kiss Me Kate is a Cole Porter musical based on Shakespeare’s The Taming of the Shrew; it is likely that Shakespeare based his play, in part at least, on the popular ballad, Merry jeste of a shrewde and curste candye kisses.

Kiss Me Quick

Rhyming slang for prick: a penis or a fool. Or dick: a penis or a fool.

X: ‘Kiss me quick’ (squeeze me slow) worn as a slogan on souvenir hats was, and maybe still is, a popular seaside invitation.

X: Kiss-me-quick has a romantic history in the hats, curls and flora of the 19th century.
kiss my arse; kiss my ass

An antique rhetorical riposte that encompasses defiance and dismissal in required measures. And if you don’t like my split infinitives you can boldly kiss my arse. That is not an invitation.

X: Irish-British celtic-folk-punk band The Pogues were originally named Pogue Mahone, an Anglophonic rendering of póg mo thóin until someone somewhere caught on and told the BBC that it was Irish for kiss my arse. That’s no way to get on with Auntie.

kiss of death

Anything that guarantees failure for a planned or ongoing activity. Or anyone.

X: Don’t never ax a grammarian supremacist to [insert adverb] proofread a blog. Kiss of death, that’ll be.

kiss of life

Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, rescue respiration as was once practiced by first aiders everywhere. It’s complicated but there are a number of good reasons why chest compressions are now preferred. Takes all the fun out of it.
It’s also rhyming slang for wife.
X: Nellie the Elephant or Staying Alive offer exactly the right rhythm for the first aider to singalong and pump away.

kiss off

To remove, to kill. It’s a bit of dated American slang from the days when gangsters, hepcats and Hollywood spread the word and got kissed off.

kiss teeth

When the intention is to convey disappointment, disdain, dissatisfaction or irritation, kiss teeth is the action of sucking air through the teeth accompanied by sufficient tongue movement to create a sucking noise. Sort of a wet ‘tut’.

kiss the book

Take an oath (on your appropriate book).

kiss the cup

Take a drink (of your preferred tipple).
kiss the ring

Show respect. To kiss someone’s ring was originally an act of obeisance to monarchy, nobility and the Catholic hierarchy. Now kissing the ring is used more loosely and applied figuratively.

kissability

The tempting nature of kissable lips rather than an active ability to kiss.

kissage

Kissing. Nothing more or less than kissing. Rare but rather lovely. Nothing nicer than a spot of kissage and huggage if that’s your baggage.

kisses and hugs

Rhyming slang for drugs.

kisser

Your kisser is your north and south. Your kisser is your dial. It’s slang, originally used in the boxing world. Your mouth. Your face. Your kisser.

Kissing the Pink


XXX. And that’s not to mention kiss the dust, kiss the ground, kiss the rod, kiss the stocks, kiss-cloud, kiss-cow, kiss-me, kiss-me-at-the-gate, kiss-me-ere-I-rise, kiss-my-loof, kiss-sky, kissing bug, kissing cousin, kissing-crust, kissing gate, kissing kind, kissing trap, kissingly and kissproof, all of which and more you can find in the OED should the mood take you.

kiss up to

US variation of ‘suck up to’.
Kissy Suzuki

She only lived twice. Kissy is a character in Ian Fleming’s 1964 novel You Only Live Twice who, among other adventures, gets pregnant by James Bond. Her backstory and arc in the 1967 movie You Only Live Twice are somewhat different. Kissy was played on screen by Mie Hama, dubbed by Nikki van der Zyl and doubled in the swimming sequence by Diane Cilento (who, at that time, was married to Sean Connery who, at that time, was James Bond). Kissy Suzuki appears in a 2012 list of best ‘Bond girl’ names.

Les Kiss

Rhyming slang for piss. Less sapphic and more Australian rugby league than you might have imagined.

Liverpool kiss

An intertemperate tête à tête; maybe a little looser in definition but surely no less violent than the later Glasgow kiss.

mwah

This may be either an overemphasised kiss or an air kiss. Used as an interjection that represents of the sound of a big, biggish or, at the very least, overly sincere kiss. Mwah! X: Purists and traditionalists are often surprised to find mwah in a dictionary – but there it is. First recorded in 1966 in the US. It is the early 1990s before the UK puckers up and takes notice.

mwah-mwah

To kiss in an over-the-top fashion or to air kiss. Not so much a word as a spelling attempt to capture an imitation of the sound of someone making all the right noises while taking a double kiss. But, yes, it’s in the dictionary. And it’s fun to mwah-mwah.

X: What’s more, mwahahaha! as a cartoony representation of villainous laughter has been in the OED since 2012. Take that, you dictionary pedants! Mwahahaha has nothing to do with mwah-mwahing. Honest. Entirely different motivation… Mwahahaha!

mwah my ass

A nicely alliterative version of kiss my ass. As seen on T-shirts.

osculate

To kiss. It’s a bit more of a mouthful than kiss with its down to earth, keeping it real, Old English etymology cred; to osculate has Latin roots and therefore, you might think, lends a little arch dignity to the whole sloppy business.
peck
A quick or perfunctory kiss. Verb and noun. Perhaps in imitation of a bird’s beak action.

plates and dishes

raspberry kiss
The pressing of lips to skin to produce a farty sound. Blowing a raspberry, of course, may be considered disrespectful. On the other hand a raspberry kiss is somewhere between silly and intimate. Derives from rhyming slang: ‘raspberry tart’, fart.

rattler’s hiss
American rhyming slang for kiss.

riddle and kiss
Rhyming slang for piss. No, I have no idea why either. Other than the fact it rhymes.

smack; smacker; smackeroo
A noisy kiss when planted on a kissee.

snog
An extended and full on kiss and cuddle. Verb and noun. And well worth the effort.

soul kiss
A French kiss in other words. Verb and noun.

suck face
To kiss, to French kiss, especially with youthful vigour. Very much a triumph of content over style.

SWALK; SWAK
Sealed With A Loving Kiss; Sealed With A Kiss. Once, this was WW2 back-of-the-envelope stuff now it’s WWW sexts that get all the coded action. But of all the well-known codes on the back of soldiers’ letters home SWALK is the stand out, the one that make no real sense as a word. What or where is a swalk?
The best-known examples of the SWALK form (apart from SWALK) adopt towns and countries as the source of saucy acronyms. Here’s just a few: BURMA – Be Upstairs Ready My Angel; ENGLAND – Every Naked Girl Loves A Naked Dick; NORWICH – Nickers (knickers) Off Ready When I Get Home; EGYPT – Eager to Grab Your Pretty Tits. More sentimental in tone (and with Brexit in mind) you might prefer to holiday in FRANCE – Friendship Remains And Never Can End or ITALY – I Trust And Love You.

ta-ta kiss

To take the ta-ta kiss (or the goodnight kiss) is to take the piss.

tonsil hockey

French kissing embraced with passionate vigour. To play tonsil hockey well is to demonstrate joy in the game of love.

Tooting Bec; Tooting

A rhyming slang peck.

Tooting Bec; Tooting

A rhyming slang peck.

X

In written communications, a kiss. There is little more pleasing than getting lots of kisses on the bottom.

XXXXX: The Bald-Headed Hermit & The Artichoke, A. D. Peterkin’s ‘Erotic Thesaurus’ offers us a long list of alternatives for kiss, including: Box tonsils, buzz, canoodle, exchange spit, face rape, face time, give a tonsillectomy, give sugar, give tongue, goo it, grease, grub, have some lip action, have some tongue sushi, lip, lock lips, lollygag, mack, make kissy-face, make licky-face, make out, make smacky lips, mesh, MKA [major kiss action], mouse, mouth, mouth wrestle, mow, muckle on, mug, muzzle, neck, PDA [public display of affection], park, pass secrets, perch, plant a big one, play kissy-poo, play mouth music, poof (!?), scoop, smooch, smoodge, smoush, smooch, stir, suck heads, swap spit, taste, throw the tongue, tongue wrestle, zoom in.

Enjoy.

XXX
SWALK; SWAK
Linda Wood
Cardiff Bay
The Monmouthshire Brecon Canal
Clydach Waterfall
Brecon Beacons
Ross on Wye
http://www.abergavennyartists.co.uk/wood.html
I was interested to read in today’s Daily Mail a double page spread under the headline "The Birth of the Busby Babes"

The feature recalled a football match which took place on the Cae Mawr Field in Treorchy on May 15 1951. The match was between Pentre Boys Club and Manchester United Juniors which the English outfit claimed a 1-0 win.

The match had come about because Pentre born Jimmy Murphy, who was an assistant manager at Manchester United decided to bring the young team which included Bill Foulkes, Jackie Blanchflower and Dennis Viollet to his home patch.

In 2011 I did a two part feature on Jimmy Murphy, known as “The Starmaker” and a man whom Sir Bobby Charlton said: “Whatever I have achieved in football, I owe to one man and only one man – Jimmy Murphy.” Here it is...

The year 1910 proved to be a momentous one in the Rhondda Valley. It was the year that valley miners went into battle against pit owners in what would be marked in history as the Tonypandy Riots.

It was also a year that a bonny baby boy with an Irish name, who would became a prominent figure in one of the most famous football clubs in the world, was born in Treharne Street, Pentre.
James Patrick Murphy was brought up in a disciplined valley household in which he was taught life's values aimed at moulding him into a "decent Rhondda boy."
In later years, those values would help him achieve an important place in the colourful history of the mighty Manchester United Football Club.

A career in football was not on the agenda in the Murphy household, however, with Jimmy's parents Florence and William nurturing high hopes of him becoming a teacher.
It was with some pride that they watched their young son play the organ at a Treorchy church but the feet which pressed on the instrument pedals were itching to kick a leather football against the walls of the back streets of Pentre.

Playing football for Pentre Linnets, Pentre Boys and Treorchy Juniors, Jimmy was showing great potential in his role of inside forward.
While attending Pentre School, the footballing talent of young Murphy caught the eye of teachers Arthur Hanney and George Tewkesbury.

In later years, Jimmy would remember with great fondness the advice and encouragement given by the teachers, which would eventually win him a place in the Wales Schoolboys team.

DESSERT RAT
In 1924, he represented Wales against England in Cardiff and his performance on the field came to the notice of football league outfit West Bromwich Albion.
Scouts from the Midlands-based club travelled to South Wales with the aim of signing the talented Rhondda youngster.
After Jimmy's parents were given assurances that he would be well looked after, Jimmy packed a suitcase and set off to start a football career across the border.

The hustle and bustle of West Bromwich was a far cry from the young life Jimmy had spent in the Rhondda, but although he became very homesick he was determined to become successful.
There were more honours to come for Jimmy on the national front when in 1933 at the age of 21 he became the youngest player to pull on a Wales shirt.

He remained a part of the national side for six years, during which he became the youngest player to win 21 caps and also became the Wales captain.
The highlight of the years he spent in the Midlands was playing for the Baggies in the 1935 FA Cup final against Sheffield Wednesday.

Murphy spent 11 happy years with West Brom before moving to Swindon Town in 1938, but the outbreak of World War II curtailed his club career.

Shortly after World War II was declared, most football competitions were abandoned as the country's focus turned to the War Effort. Although his days of playing football had come to an end, Jimmy Murphy's career as a football coach was about to begin.

Jimmy was a member of the Royal Artillery which battled the enemy in the Far East and also spent four years in North Africa as a "Desert Rat".
MATT BUSBY

It was a boiling hot afternoon in Bari, Italy, in 1945 and the weather matched the passionate team talk Rhondda-born Jimmy Murphy was giving to a team of Army footballers.

While coach Murphy was busy inspiring his team with the gusto and arm-waving of a Welsh Baptist minister, another football coach named Matt Busby listened with fascination to the Welshman’s team talk. The two coaches struck up a friendship and Busby, who would shortly return to England to become manager of Manchester United, offered Murphy a job as his assistant in the rebuilding of the war-torn club. It was the beginning of a remarkable partnership which would endure until 1969, when the then Sir Matt Busby retired.

In his new role with United, Jimmy – together with coach Bert Whalley and chief scout Joe Armstrong – developed an exciting stream of talented young footballers who came to be known as the Busby Babes. Jimmy was appointed the club’s assistant manager in March 1955 and three years later was named as the manager of the Wales team.

On February 6, while returning to Manchester after a World Cup match between Wales and Israel in Cardiff, Jimmy heard the devastating news that the plane carrying United players, club officials and journalists home from a European Cup match had crashed on its third attempt to take off from a slush-covered runway at the Munich Riem airport.

Among the 23 who perished were eight United players, including Tommy Taylor, Roger Byrne and Duncan Edwards.

A distraught Jimmy Murphy immediately flew out to Germany and arrived in time to find relatives surrounding the bed of the gravely-ill Matt Busby who was being given the Last Rites. Although at death’s door, the United manager whispered to Jimmy, urging him “to keep the Red Flag flying”.

CARETAKER MANAGER.

The 47-year-old Rhondda-born coach, who played the organ in a Treorchy church as a boy, was now in charge of one of the most famous football clubs in the world, while Matt Busby battled his way back from the brink of death.

Two weeks after the Munich disaster, Jimmy managed a team which included survivors Harry Gregg and Bill Foulkes, along with seven reserves and emergency signings Ernie Taylor and Stan Crowther, in an FA Cup match in which they beat Sheffield Wednesday.

Jimmy remained as caretaker manager at Old Trafford until August, when Matt Busby made his return. Despite his remarkable commitment to rebuilding United, Jimmy remained as Wales manager and guided his side through to the quarter-finals of the 1958 World Cup, where they were defeated by Brazil.

Jimmy Murphy died in November 1989, aged 79, while in 2009 a blue plaque was placed on his former family home in Treharne Street, Pentre.
Dave Edwards is a retired journalist who, although a Merthyr boy, for many years worked on the newsdesk of the Rhondda Leader. Now retired Dave has taken up the quill again to write a book on which he reflects on some of the unforgettable stories and the many characters he has encountered during his rollercoaster years working for the ‘Leader’.

Dave always maintains he could walk into any club or pub in the Rhondda and leave with a fistful of stories.

Dave and I both worked in the Rhondda at the same time. While Dave’s profession was journalism mine was education. Dave would have made a good doctor - he certainly stitched me up more times than I care to remember.

On one occasion, when I was headteacher of Pentre, a child was admitted to our infant department from another school. During his first morning he somehow managed to elude the care of his teachers and run home. Fortunately he was stopped halfway down the hill from the school by a concerned parent who promptly returned him to us.

His parents appeared to be very understanding and informed us that he was always doing this in his old school. Mightily relieved we made a very quick appraisal of our safety arrangements and breathed a huge sigh of relief.

Front Page of the next edition of the Leader featured a picture of the child in question sat next to his distressed mother. The child was holding an A-Z street map of Rhondda. Nice one Dave!

To be fair if I had been in Dave’s shoes I would probably have done the same.

The Nine Stone Cowboy is available from Amazon.

Dave has vividly evoked so many memories. Humorous, poignant and enlightening. Many of Rhondda’s iconic figures make an appearance.

Jimmy Murphy and his part in helping Manchester United pull through the trauma of Munich is one such episode. Then there are the ill-fated friends who set out for America to earn their fortune with their fists aboard the Titanic. And as for ‘the nine stone cowboy’ - I actually knew him when he was only 3 stone! A cracking read wherever you are from. Thanks Dave. I am now waiting for the next one.
Remember Yesterday?

To: stevephillips@gmail.com
Subject: Tonypandy Grammar Reunion
Haven’t had a reply from you Steve. You are coming I hope? We’re in your old watering hole The Welcome Inn this year. There’s not too many of us left now! Ha ha! Phil Snook, Ralph and Pam Richardson, Eddie Kiff and Lisa Snodgrass (nee Williams) are def coming. Didn’t you and Lisa have a thing going back in the day? Let me know ASAP
x x x
Linda.

Dear old Linda, still the organiser. I stared at the email for a long time. Could I detect the faint but pungent odour of desperation or was it just my imagination? Soon there would be precious few of us left to organise anything more than a game of dominoes. An image of a polar bear stranded on a fast dissolving sliver of ice cap came to mind. We all mark the passing of time with our own measure.

Reunions at my age become synonymous with death and decay.
ME: “Are you still in touch with Alfie?”
FORMER CLASSMATE: (SOLEMN PAUSE) “Haven’t you heard?”
ME: (THINKING - OBVIOUSLY NOT!) No.
FORMER CLASSMATE: “Died last year. The ‘Big C’. Only found out he had it in May. Dead by September.”
ME: (RESPECTFUL NOD OF THE HEAD) “Typical Alfie, he was never one to hang around where he wasn’t wanted.”
(CUE ABRUPT END TO CONVERSATION)

I was actually surprised Linda had sent me an invite. The situation must be dire. I was beginning to feel like the Indian with the unpronounceable name who was the last of his tribe, Mohicans if my memory serves me correct. Did I really want to listen to a longer roll call of the ‘dear departed’ and spend my night figuratively tripping over the dead bodies of former classmates? Linda would probably have been better off organising a séance.

There was definitely no way I was going to attend another reunion but now things had changed. I continued to stare at the email my focus on just two words:

LISA WILLIAMS!

They flamed like beacons from a distant past. Suddenly I was conscious of the face staring back at me from the translucent depths of the laptop. Age hadn’t been too unkind. In fact the silvery grey hair afforded me a quiet dignity of the sort admired in marble busts of ancient Roman emperors. The mirror was less kind than the laptop. I never liked that mirror. It had been a present from an Aunt who wasn’t invited to our wedding. As a child I had been convinced she was a witch and always avoided her hairy warts when ordered to supply a parting kiss. The mirror was her revenge. Everybody looked good in it except me.

My jowls were beginning to sag like two over packed bags of Tesco shopping. “You’re not bad for your age Dad,” my daughters would frequently remark if ever they caught me glaring back at my spiteful reflection, faint praise that damned worse than the truth. As the years relentlessly turn what we once were diminishes and fades lingering only in the shadows of our memories. Lost souls bound to a world that has long since passed away.

Now Lisa had stirred the ashes. To my surprise I felt the heat of half remembered passionate encounters glow bright like embers of a fire that had not quite gone out. Was it possible that fifty years on the mere mention of her name could still quicken my pulse with anticipation? I was no longer Dad, or Gramps or any of the other titles the years deposit like sediment on the original bedrock of our being. I was Steve again and life lay fresh before me in all its promised glory.

Guilt dragged me protesting back to my senses. Gwen and I had been together nearly 40 years. Our marriage was crammed full of the usual clichés. We’d had our ups and downs but with a little bit of give and take we’d muddled through and although we weren’t exactly Jack and Jill we did live on a hill. We had four children we loved and two grandchildren we adored. Yearning for a nostalgic hike through the blue remembered hills seemed almost an act of treachery, a rejection of all that we had built together.

To: lindamac@hotmail.com
Subject: TonyPandy Grammar Reunion
Hi Linda,
Sorry I haven’t got back in touch. Of course I’ll be there! Wouldn’t miss it for the world. Gwen can’t make it so I’m afraid I’ll be on my own.
See you then.
Steve.
I glanced around furtively even though I knew Gwen was at her local writers group for at least another hour. What was I thinking committing myself to an evening listening to another litany of hard luck stories or bitter reminisce of broken relationships and who had been awarded custody of the dog? Worse were those family obsessed individuals who gleefully gloated over the success of their offspring and stubbornly refused to be diverted to any other topic once they got you cornered. But worst of all were the tiny but elite group of over achievers who spent the evening smugly sipping their martinis as they watched from the lofty height of their inflated bank balances the madding crowd grow madder by the minute.

LISA WILLIAMS!
That's what I was thinking.

She was known in school as 'Moaning Lisa'. Beautiful yet distant and unattainable clothed in an aura of melancholy. The common consensus among the rejected teenage gigolos was that Lisa Williams was frigid. At least that was how they chose to salve their wounded pride. How could someone who incited such heated passion in my exploding teenage hormones emotionally consist of ice? I could feel a new expression on my face, feel a glowing sensation taking place, hear guitars playing lovely tunes every time that she walked in the room. I was convinced 'The Searchers' hit song of the day had been written with me in mind.

Many of my peers were pretty good at talking the talk when it came to recounting their amorous adventures with the opposite sex. I just listened, sautéed by my own indecision over the simmering heat of repressed emotions. Rejection was the tin lid that pressed down firmly on the volatile mix of my suppressed passions until one day I could bear it no longer. Better to be spurned than endure the daily agony of inaction that gave way to reproachful nights full of self loathing. Tomorrow it would be different.

Tomorrow came. What if I did not get a chance to speak to her? There was always tomorrow! Then it happened. I emerged from the art class full of high spirits. Art was my favourite subject and was held in a room adjacent to the staircase. As I turned onto the top step so Lisa was approaching from below. We both stopped and I could swear she smiled at me. It was always hard to tell with Lisa. In that moment the damn burst and my pent up feelings erupted in a molten torrent of raw emotion.

"Lisa," I stuttered, "would you like to go out with me?"
For me, back then, that constituted a torrent of raw emotion.
She said nothing for a long moment and I felt my courage ebb away. I was nine again standing at the edge of an ocean that was just too big and too cold.
"When?" She asked.
My mouth was so dry that forming words was almost impossible.
"Tonight," I croaked.
"Where?" She asked.
I was beginning to hyperventilate. Was she toying with me? Classmates passed us and cast curious glances, some whispered to each other and my brain primed itself to enter fight or flight mode.
"The Plaza," I said. It was the first thing that popped into my head, the local fleapit on Tonypandy Square, hardly the most romantic setting for a first date.
"What time?" she inquired in that calm quiet voice that only accentuated my rising panic.
"Seven," I spluttered and waited for the inevitable put down. Hopefully it would be nothing more brutal than,
"Sorry I'm washing my hair."
"Ok," she replied smiling a real smile. Two of her friends appeared as if from nowhere and they breezed off together leaving me adrift like a dead leaf in their wake. God, what had I done?
The rest of the day I spent in a funk of blind panic. What would I wear? What would I say? Would I even be able to speak? Rejection would have been much easier to handle. Should I hold her hand? Should we sit in the back row known commonly as 'grunt and grope alley' or would she think me too forward? How would she react if I
put my arm around her? What about our first kiss if it ever came to that? God, what had I done?

Throughout that interminable afternoon I studiously avoided Lisa. Cast adrift on the seas of my feverish imagination the evening’s assignation hung round my neck like the albatross from Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner. Somehow, I managed to maintain a semblance of normality and when the school bell rang I was out of the blocks and heading home quicker than Usain Bolt.
“You’re home early,” observed my mother her antennae tingling as I barged in through the back door.
“Need a quick bath,” I replied and realised immediately I had made a serious tactical error.
“Going out somewhere?” she probed.
“Yes,” I replied in a doomed attempt to end the conversation.
“Where?” she inquired eyeing me in much the way our cat eyed birds that landed in the garden.
“Pictures,” I replied casually and knew there was no avoiding the next question. “With the boys?” she asked raising an eyebrow.
I didn’t need a mirror to realise I’d turned the colour of a ripe tomato. My mother narrowed her eyes and smiled.
“I see,” she said accusingly, “a date is it?”
My silence was ample confirmation.
“What’s her name?”
This was what suspects must feel like when they are being grilled by the FBI.
“Lisa,” I mumbled.
“Does she have a surname?” my mother was relentless, and I was hopelessly backed into a corner with no chance of a bell to save my blushes.
“Williams,” I conceded.
My mother nodded and gazed at me for what seemed an eternity without speaking. The silence was becoming oppressive.
“You go have your bath and I’ll put your suit out on the bed,” she said at last.
I was so relieved to escape that I didn’t consider the implications.

A hot bath never failed to relax me but not this time. I might as well have been marinating in my own cold sweat. What if she didn’t turn up? What if she did? There were worst things than standing like a loser outside your local cinema waiting for a girl who didn’t show. I would not be the first and I would not be the last but what if she did show and the date was an absolute disaster? Me and Lisa Williams, who was I kidding, she was Champions League material while the best I could aspire to was a kick about on the local park. Had I condemned myself to a lifetime of sniggering contempt?

“Heard about Lisa and Steve? Apparently, he tried to grope her in the back row.”
What actually happened was I dropped my favourite flavour Spangle and tried to grab it before it hit the floor. It was dark, and I miscalculated.
“Gross!”
“Yeah, apparently he’s a real creep.”
“Oh, hi Steve,” they wave and walk off giggling and that’s just the beginning.

“Steve! Better get a move on it’s a quarter past six, wouldn’t do to be late on your first date.”
Like the Archangel’s trump my mother’s voice dragged me back from the precipice of self doubt. I clambered out of the bath dried myself and brushed my teeth with a masochistic ferocity that was tantamount to an assault on the enamel. My next task was to decide what aftershave to wear even though I had not yet begun shaving in earnest. Blue Blazer, Old Spice or Lemon and Lime Old Spice, the choice was dizzying. Which would Lisa prefer? I settled for Old Spice Lemon and Lime then changed my mind three times before deciding to stick with my original selection.
To keep from being submerged in a rising tide of panic I focused on making myself as presentable as possible. I was holding it together well until I walked into my room and saw the suit laid out on the bed. My mother had obviously been shopping in Polikoff’s factory outlet again. Probably buy one get two free. I stared at it horror wrestling with disbelief for mastery of my emotions. What was she thinking? Ten years back and I wouldn’t have blinked an eyelid but in fashion terms ten years is equivalent to the Jurassic period.

One of the iconic images of the Fifties was the Teddy Boy. Gangs of youths, dressed in clothes that paid tribute to the age of the Edwardian ‘Dandy’, hung aimlessly around dance halls and street corners wolf whistling at girls and generally looking for trouble. Rock and Roll was king and everyone wore ‘brothel creepers’ or ‘winkle pickers’. Even their feet had attitude which was hardly surprising given the pressure they must have been under from the skin tight ‘drain pipe’ trousers. Mercifully the trousers on the bed looked as if they would allow my blood to circulate fairly freely around my legs. That was the only positive I could extract from the situation.

Just as tribute bands are pale reflections of the original artist so the suit was a muted homage to those halcyon days when rebellious youth found its expression in outrageous fashion. It was light green with a dark green collar and dark green piping around the pockets. A garment designed to bridge the gap between generations unfortunately disappeared into the dark void that separated them. The only response the wearer could reasonably expect was either a grimace or a smirk. It was the coup de grace to my hopes of a blossoming romance with the lovely Lisa. I sat forlornly on the edge of the bed and hung my head. Looking back I wonder if the suit was a calculated attempt by my mother to deliberately sabotage any possibility of my forming a relationship with a girl who would supplant her place in my affections. Truth was she just didn’t have a clue about what was considered cool or nerdy. Fashion was not her thing.

Fate had conspired with my mother to crush my hopes and dreams and so, defeated, I put on the suit.

“You look lovely Stephen,” she twittered as I entered the room, “doesn’t he look lovely Harry?”

“Lovely,” said my father not looking up from his newspaper.

“Put that paper down for goodness sake and show a little interest. This is your son’s first date.”

My father lowered the newspaper and in his eyes my worst fears were realised.

“You can borrow my penknife if you like son,” he said.

“What are you talking about,” my mother was confused, “why would he want to borrow your penknife.”

“In case he can’t find his flick knife,” replied my father heaping more confusion on my mother’s head.

Five minutes late! I’d been stood up. I’ll give her another five then I’m going home. Five minutes turned into twenty as I studiously ignored the glances of passers by their expressions fluctuating between amusement and pity. God I hoped nobody I knew from school turned up. The possibility filled me with such dread that flight was the only realistic option. My date had hit the iceberg and I was sinking fast, time to lower the lifeboat.

“Hi, sorry, the bus was late.”

And there she was a vision of loveliness standing in front of me like some Aphrodite emerging from the deep.

“That’s ok,” I replied, “you look really nice.”

She did not reply her eyes were fixed firmly on my suit.

“Where did you get your suit?” she asked.

“My mother bought it,” I replied, “she works in Polikoff’s.”

“Oh,” she said making no further comment.

There was a moment’s uncomfortable silence.

“Come on,” said Lisa taking me by the hand, “or we’ll miss the start. I’ve been dying to see this film for ages.”

I happily allowed myself to be gently dragged towards the ticket booth as Lisa took the lead. To be truthful I was in a kind of trance unable to believe I was actually holding hands with Lisa Williams. We sat in the back row.
The film was only a third of the way through when she rested her head on my shoulder. I tentatively placed an arm around her and she snuggled even closer. That was how we watched Diana Ross depict the troubled life of Billie Holiday in 'Lady Sings the Blues' apart from an occasional fumble in the bag of popcorn.

We missed the bus and I walked her home. It was quite a trek but neither of us cared. When we got to her doorstep she stood in front of me and smiled.

“Thank you for a lovely evening,” she said.

Before I could reply she leant forward and kissed me full on the lips for what seemed a long time. Then suddenly she pulled away and turned to open the door.

“Can I see you again?” I spluttered afraid she would vanish out of my life like some Welsh Persephone summoned back to a realm beyond my reach.

“You'll see me in school tomorrow,” she replied. Seeing my crestfallen expression she laughed, “What about Friday?”

“Friday would be great,” I said, “same time?”

“Same place,” she countered, “wear a different suit,” then disappeared indoors.

I walked home in a daze. Every so often I would pinch myself to make sure I really was awake and this wasn’t some cruel fragile dream that must evaporate at the first light of a grey dawn. I mentally constructed a future with Lisa at its heart but even then deep down I think I knew its foundation was built on shifting sand. So began my butterfly summer with Lisa Williams. We dated regularly. I began to understand that beneath her quietly confident exterior dwelt an insecure individual in constant need of reassurance and I believe in me she sensed a kindred spirit. Even now I wonder if I had been able to give expression to my true feelings would things have turned out different. But we were both young and unsure of ourselves bound to our fates by whatever god had fashioned us in his image. We simply met too soon. Roy Orbison was right, “We were too young to understand to ever know.”

Lisa became a regular visitor to our house and a firm favourite with my father. My mother was less of a fan and always maintained a certain distance. We increasingly spent more time in the front room listening to records or snogging on the sofa. The Sixties gave birth to pop culture with groups like the Beatles, the Searchers and the Kinks providing the background music against which was played out our brief romance. One song in particular held a special significance for us. ‘Yesterday’ by the Beatles was playing the first time we made love one sultry summer evening when my parents were out with friends. I foolishly believed it had consummated our relationship but I was wrong.

Like the invisible worm that flies in the night our innate insecurities burrowed their way into the heart of our blossoming and vulnerable love. More than ever Lisa needed the reassurance that I was unable to articulate and we drifted apart. The end still came as a shock from which I believe I never fully recovered. Like a shipwrecked mariner I clung to the hope I could win her back but that finally died when she met someone else. We both went our separate ways. Me to college, where in my final year I met Gwen and the rest as they say, is history.

“What are you up to then?”

I hadn't even heard the front door open so preoccupied had I become with my bitter sweet reminiscences. Was there an accusatory tone in Gwen's voice or was it simply my guilty conscience?

“You're home early love,” I responded and shut the lap top quickly before Gwen could glimpse the email.

“Yeah,” she replied giving me a querulous glance as though she had come home and caught me surfing sites that men of my age allegedly gravitate towards. More blue remembered hills. “The library finishes earlier now. Bloody council, there'll be no where left to go if they make any more cuts. We'll probably end up having to meet on a park bench. I expect we'll have to book it in advance mind.”
I nodded, feigning concern. “Something interesting,” she said staring at my laptop and I realised I had aroused her suspicions when I slammed it shut.

“Not really,” I tried to sound convincing, “just an email from Linda about another reunion.” She hovered over me and I knew I had no alternative but to open the damn thing. So what if she did read the email? The name Lisa Williams would hold no significance for her. In our early days we had spoken about past relationships but for some reason I had never mentioned Lisa. Gwen possessed more than her fair share of womanly intuition and suspected I was holding something or someone back but had never been able to tease a name from me. Lisa was just one of those secret shadows most married couples dance around in the course of their lives together. Then I recalled Linda’s mischievous words dangled like live bait at the end of the email.

“Didn’t you and Lisa have a thing going back in the day?”

Gwen would surely put two and two together but the longer I delayed the more suspicious she would become. I opened the laptop and held my breath. This was ridiculous, why did I feel like an adulterous husband hiding in his lover’s wardrobe?

Gwen squinted at the screen. “That print’s much too small,” she observed, “I’d need my reading glasses.” I heaved a sigh of relief as she turned away.

“Anyway,” she called as she put the kettle on, “I thought you said you’d never go to another. You moaned enough about the last one.”

“Yeah well,” I stalled desperately thinking of a plausible reason for my dramatic change of heart, “it will probably be the last chance I’ll get to see all of them again. Phil wasn’t looking too good last time. To be honest I’m surprised he’s still around for this one.”

“I can see you’re really going to be the life and soul of the party,” she said. “You can count me out, I couldn’t stick another one, you’ll have to go on your own.”

“Fair enough,” I replied struggling to sound disappointed.

I stood outside The Welcome Inn as nervous as I had been on our first date. Was this a mistake? We hadn’t exactly parted as friends, we’d just parted.

“Steve Phillips boy!” said a voice to my left.

Two elderly gents stood against the side of the building smiling at me effusively. Who they were I had not a clue.

“Long time no see,” said the second voice as he moved to shake my hand with genuine enthusiasm.

In that moment I realised they were actually former classmates but which exactly I had absolutely no idea. At least I was still recognisable.

“Boys men,” I responded pumping their proffered hands, hoping to bluff my way through this excruciating encounter. “Well, better get in and mingle,” I said at length and turned away to make for the door.

“Catch up with you inside,” one of them shouted.

I raised my hand feebly in response.

Contrary to my expectations the place was crowded. It seemed as if all the swallows had gathered for one last summer. A cursory glance around the room proved fruitless but what was I expecting anyway? I had changed and so inevitably had Lisa. Time touches all of us with its bitter embrace. I made my way to the bar seeking the familiar security of a beer. Most people were clustered in groups deep in conversation. Studiously avoiding eye contact with anyone I crossed to the least populated corner of the room and sipped my drink. The irony of the situation suddenly struck me. It had been almost fifty years since our fleeting affair. Lisa and I could be standing next to each other and not even know it. This had been a massive mistake. I would drink my beer and leave.

Even as I made my decision someone detached themselves from a group at the other side of the room and headed straight for me. When I say ‘headed’ she actually seemed to glide with a grace I recognised despite the intervening years. I took a sip of tepid beer, not for the taste but to wet the inside of my mouth which had suddenly dried up. I was outside the Plaza again in my Teddy Boy tribute suit getting ready to trip over my tongue.
“Hello Steve, long time no see how are you?”
I swallowed hard and nodded.
“Good, I’m good, how about you?”
Was that the best I could come up with? No wonder she’d dumped me.
In response to my question she turned her palms outwards as if to say, “What you see is what you get.”
“I can tell you now Steve, after all these years, I had a real thing for you back then.”
There was a look in her eyes that told me ‘the thing’ was still very much alive.
“Then why did you leave me,” I wanted to ask but all I could say was, “God Lisa, you haven’t changed a bit. Do you remember ’Yesterday’?”
She didn’t reply but her eyes hardened and a distinct chilliness enveloped me. Had I gone too far too soon? Was she with her husband and considered my remark inappropriate or offensive?
“I remember yesterday very well Steve, but you’re obviously having a little trouble. My name’s Barbara.”
Barbara turned abruptly on her heels and flounced back across the room. I took another sip of beer. If I left now I might still catch the end of ‘Match of the Day’.

To: stevephillips@gmail.com
Subject: Tonypandy Grammar Reunion
Hi Steve,
Sorry I didn’t get a chance to speak to you on Friday. Seems you left quite early on in proceedings. Barbara John said she spoke to you. Did you know she had quite a crush on you back in the day? TBH she was a bit upset that you didn’t remember her. To make it worse you thought she was Lisa!!
Lisa couldn’t make it. She’s on honeymoon with her fourth husband in the Caribbean. Whirlwind romance apparently but you know Lisa she always was a bit of a butterfly. Barbara said you asked if she remembered yesterday which she thought was an odd way to put it. Wasn’t ’Yesterday’ a song by the Beatles? If I recall correctly it always made Lisa cry whenever she heard it.
Well see you at the next reunion if we’re both still around.
Bye Steve.

x x x
Linda

Phil's Books
A Manhattan Ghost Story

The Pit Of Shadows

Jack's High

Phil Rowlands is editor of Tales From Wales.
He began writing seriously after retiring from his post as head teacher of Pentre Primary School.
His first novella A Manhattan Ghost Story is based on Dickens’ A Christmas Carol.
It received a very favourable review on the BBC Radio Show Roy’s Reads.
In December 2012 a staged adaptation was actually performed in Manhattan by the City Bar Entertainment Committee to commemorate the anniversary of the publication of Dickens’ much loved story.
Phil started Tales From Wales as he felt there was a need for the work of writers in Wales to receive wider recognition. The response so far would suggest he is correct in that assumption. Remember Yesterday is an autobiographical story with a little poetic license thrown in for good measure.
Lavinia O'Brien
Waterfall at Pontneddfechan
Bridge at Tregate
Mother and Baby

http://www.abergavennyartists.co.uk/lavinia.html
KAREN ANKERS
Karen Ankers lives in Anglesey, North Wales. She remembers growing to love books as a child, relishing the chance to explore other worlds and lose herself in stories. Her earliest inspiration was Alan Garner, whose sense of magic and wonder shaped the way she saw the world around her. She spent much of her life in Chester and was an active member of the Chester Poets for several years, appearing in many of their anthologies. Their early encouragement was the springboard for her writing career. “If they hadn’t taken my scribblings seriously,” she says, “I probably wouldn’t be writing today.”

Karen feels that her writing enables her to give a voice to those who would otherwise not have one, and her poetry, in particular, is often socially motivated. She also draws inspiration for her writing from Wales’ mythic landscape and its story-telling tradition. The Celtic acceptance of the ever-present Otherworld fascinates her, giving, as it does, a sense of different layers of reality being able to exist together. She will never lose the love of magic she discovered as a child and hopes to continue to explore this through her novels.
MARGARET GRANT
After Drama school in London, where she won the best actress award the year following Helen Mirren, Margaret chose to make drama teaching her career and wrote many customized plays for her comprehensive school pupils. But rural life beckoned and she and her husband decided to bring up their young family on the island of Anglesey in North Wales. It was during her years there, living on the beautiful mountain of Mynydd Llwydiarth, that she became fascinated by its Druid past and began the research for her first novel, which she planned to write whenever time would afford.

She returned to teaching in the 1980’s but this time to a primary school, where she enjoyed writing stories for morning assembly and creating dance dramas. Since her days in teaching she has enjoyed researching the lives of the elderly and has been involved in a variety of voluntary work. This has included Reiki healing, which has given her rich insights into the work of a healer and empathy with the main character in her first novel, ‘Where Rowans Intertwine’.

Following a move to Sheffield, she concentrated on renovating an old farm worker’s cottage and finishing the much-awaited novel. She won a local writing competition for BBC Radio Sheffield: ‘My Journey to Faith - How I became a Bahá’í’ - a humble accolade, but encouraging. The first novel ‘Where Rowans Intertwine,’ is complete and is available on Amazon as both an ebook and a paperback, but the second one is brewing. Recently retired to Lincolnshire, she now has the freedom to make writing more of a career.

MARY GRAND
I was born in Cardiff and have retained a deep love for my Welsh roots. I worked as a nursery teacher in London and later taught Deaf children in Croydon and Hastings.

I now live on the beautiful Isle of Wight with my husband, where I walk my cocker spaniel Pepper and write. I have two grown up children.

‘Free to Be Tegan’ was my debut novel. The second ‘Hidden Chapters’ is set on the spectacular Gower Peninsula. I have also published two short books of short stories ‘Catching the Light’ and ‘Making Changes’. ‘Catching the Light’ is also available as an audiobook, narrated by Petrina Kingham.

My next novel, ‘Behind The Smile’ is set on the Isle of Wight and will be published in spring 2018.
The Crossing Place is a dark-edged love story. Laura is frustrated with her mundane life, her boring job, and marriage to a man she no longer loves. But she does not expect things to change so dramatically and so suddenly. An accidental encounter with a homeless stranger leaves her shaken and confused, before a series of unsettling dreams disturbs her further and leaves her questioning her own sanity.

When Laura meets Paul Jayston, a handsome, charismatic past-life counsellor, she is very sceptical about his beliefs. When he suggests that her dreams might be memories of a past life, she insists there must be a rational explanation. One particularly difficult dream has her turning to Paul for help and advice, but when she is confronted by revelations about his past, Laura has to make a choice. Should she allow herself to be guided by the alternative world-view of a man with strange ideas and a questionable past, or should she try and deal alone with the unsettling things she keeps seeing?

When danger comes from an unexpected source, both Laura and Paul find themselves having to confront not only very real threats in the present, but also doubts and fears from the past.
Chapter One

Laura’s breath caught in her throat as her foot slipped at the top of the worn, icy steps. Her hand scraped the rough sandstone wall as she grasped for the metal handrail and missed. She landed sprawled across a heap of clothes that lay across the pavement. Dazed, she lay still, mentally examining her body for damage. Nothing seemed to be broken. When she tried to get to her feet, the pile of clothes moved, and she screamed.

As she scrambled away to a safe distance, the face of a man turned slowly towards her. Pale, unshaven, his mouth cracked and blistered. Greasy curls of black hair stuck out from beneath a grubby green and yellow striped hat. Wearing a thin grey coat, he sat like a broken doll on the frozen ground, leaning against the low wall that led to the busy Kale Yard car park. Tired turquoise eyes struggled to focus. Long legs lay limp across the pavement, his bare feet blue and swollen.

It was the first Sunday in February and winter was unwilling to loosen its icy grip. People pale and pinched with cold stared at the pavement as they hurried to their various destinations. Carefully wrapped in bright, warm clothes, they walked past the man with no shoes and the fallen woman without a glance. Laura felt her face turning red as she realized they thought he and she were both drunk. She tried to guess his age. A little older than her, perhaps. In his thirties.

As she stared, he frowned. “Sorry. I’ll get out of your way.”

He tried to stand, wincing with the effort of trying to move cold, cramped limbs. Laura wondered if she ought to help.

“It’s ok,” she said hurriedly. “Stay there.” If he fell, she wouldn’t have the strength to hold him.

Her side ached where her ribs had bounced along the edge of the steps. A glimmer of colour distracted her as a butterfly landed on the snow-lined wall. Fragile crimson wings with blue circles that looked like eyes. The man stretched out a pale hand towards it.

“You’re in the wrong place, mate,” he murmured.

Laura gazed across the road towards the hardware store where she worked. The shortcut behind the cathedral onto the city walls and down the steps into Frodsham Street had seemed a good idea after a dawdling bus ride. Now her coat was torn, and a bruise was forming on her left hand. She pulled herself to her feet and looked at her watch. If she went now, she would only be a few minutes late for her shift. But the more she tried not to look at the man’s swollen, bare feet, the more she saw the pale blue of skin deprived of blood. Brushing the dirt and snow from her coat, she opened her green leather handbag to reach for her purse, but then snapped it shut. This man needed more than money. His head had dropped onto his chest again and his eyes were closed. She crouched down beside him.

“Shall I call an ambulance?” she asked.

“Don’t bother.”

The bitterness in his rasping voice stayed with her as she crossed the road. Biting her lip, she watched people entering and leaving her place of work. And then she looked back at the barefoot man and at all the people who chose not to see him. Another one of Chester’s homeless. And she was suddenly ashamed of all the times she knew she would have ignored him too.

Turning left, she walked to Tesco. In the harsh blue light and overwhelming noise of the crowded aisles, she stood still and tried to think. What did he need? Food? Clothes? She didn’t really have time to waste. Wandering over to the clothes section, still thinking of his pitiful, bloodless feet, she bought several pairs of socks. Grabbing a sandwich and a warm sausage roll, she waited impatiently in a queue behind a quarrelling family with a trolley full of squashed cake and screaming children.
When she got back to the man, he had not moved. She approached slowly, watching his chest closely to see if he was breathing, wondering what she would do if he wasn’t. In films, people seemed to know what to do when they found a dead body. She was ashamed of the relief brought on by a violent coughing fit that shook his frame. She crouched down beside him and patted him on the back, feeling useless. He stared at her wildly. She wondered if he recognized her.

“I’m sorry I took so long,” she said. “I didn’t know what size shoes you took, but I thought at least these might keep your feet warm.”

He nodded, still coughing. Stiff, dirty fingers took the socks from her and struggled to release them from their wrapping.

“Let me help.”

With her teeth, Laura removed the plastic tags that kept the socks together. Then she sat back on her heels and watched as he tried to pull them onto his feet.

“Is there somewhere you can go?” she asked. She put the sandwich and sausage roll down beside him. He shook his head. He had managed to get one foot halfway into a sock. The sleeves of his coat had ridden up to reveal a red rag knotted around one thin wrist. Laura listened to the wheezing sound of his lungs straining against the cold. She turned and walked away before he saw the tears in her eyes.

She was twenty minutes late for her shift.

“I overslept.”

Robert Wain, the store manager, fiddled with the grey, frayed cuffs of his unironed shirt as he told her she would have to make up the time at the end of her shift. It hadn’t been worth telling him the truth. This was a man who made jokes about disabled customers. He wouldn’t understand that she had stopped to help a fellow human being.

She thought about the barefoot man all afternoon, wondering if he would still be there when her shift ended. Had she seen him before? There was something about his eyes, something familiar. She ought to have called an ambulance.

She was always surprised at how busy the store was on a Sunday. She remembered Sundays being special when she was a child. No church, her mother had no faith in religion. But a day of long walks and bike rides with her friends, coming home with cold hands and a red nose to a house that smelled of chocolate cake and apple pie. Now it was just like any other day. She had left Simon, her husband, at home, preparing lessons for the week ahead. She had asked if she could take the car, but he had said he needed it to go and visit a friend later in the day. Hastily finding the bus timetable, turning to the page reserved for Sundays and Bank Holidays, realizing that the buses only ran every hour and that if she missed the one that was due shortly she would have to walk into work...she had asked Simon if he would mind giving her a lift. He had calmly replied that she should have realized he would need the car and arranged to be ready in time to catch the bus. So she had tried to run to the bus stop, her feet sliding on the icy pavement, seeing the bus turn into its space by the canalside pub, hoping it wouldn’t leave before she got to it, hoping the driver would see her, hoping it was the cheerful one who sang as he drove, not the sullen one who seemed to delight in driving off even when he could see people rushing towards him... Her encounter with the barefoot man put all that into perspective. At least she had shoes to wear and a house to return to after work.
In the moments between customers, she watched the minutes count down on the blue screen in front of her, sat on her hands to keep them warm, and gazed out at shelves laden with toothpaste, soap, shampoo, air fresheners, washing-up liquid. People piled trolleys precariously high while they chatted about Saturday night’s adventures and placated screaming children with chocolate. Any other day she would have amused herself by making up stories about customers, according to what they bought. But not today. Today she was still wondering about the effect of cold on bare feet and wondering why she cared.

A man marched up to her till. He was wearing a creased grey suit with the jacket unbuttoned, and a gravy-stained blue shirt that was far too short. Stretch marks silvered the overfed white flesh that escaped the waistband of his tight trousers. He slammed his basket down on the counter so hard it almost bounced, and turned his attention to texting. Laura could smell stale sweat rising from his clothes.

She took a deep breath, turning her head away slightly. "Would you like a carrier bag?" she asked. "What?"

She repeated her question impatiently, as though talking to a small child.

"Yes," he said. She waited. Waited for the word "please." It didn’t come. So she started scanning the items in his basket, body sprays, toothpaste, ordinary things. While she scanned them, she talked about the weather, told him how busy the store had been that day. He wasn’t listening. She didn’t care. She could tell her chatter annoyed him. She mentally handed him her rudest customer of the week award and gave him a huge smile.

That will be twenty-four ninety-nine, please."

The man glared at her, held up a hand to signal that he wanted her to wait, and carried on texting. Laura smiled, counted to ten, and then asked him if he had ever been taught any manners.

He stopped texting and turned towards her, leaning on the till. Whisky on his breath.

"I’m sorry?" he said. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yes." She offered him her brightest smile. "You greedy, selfish, rude apology for a human being, I’m talking to you. Do you think I’ve got nothing better to do than sit here and wait while you text some unimportant drivel to your stupid friends?"

Instant taut silence.

"I want to speak to your manager," he hissed. "Now."

In Mr Wain’s cramped, untidy office, Laura was vaguely aware that he was saying something about written warnings and disciplinary procedure. His office window looked out onto the cathedral, and she craned her neck to see if the homeless man was still lying at the bottom of the steps. She wondered if any of her husband’s shoes might fit him. If she went home and searched his wardrobe, she might be able to get back before it got dark.

"Are you listening to me?" Mr Wain leaned forward and tapped his scratched desk with a blunt pencil.

"I’m sorry, did you say something?"

He shook his head.

"I was saying, Mrs Cullen, that we don’t expect this sort of behaviour from our staff. And I’m surprised at you. You’ve been here, what, three years now? And I’ve never had any reason to call you up here. You work hard, you have excellent time management, you’re polite... Until today. Are you sure you’re ok? There’s nothing wrong at home? Nothing we can help you with?"

She was surprised at herself. It wasn’t as if she particularly enjoyed her job, but it served a purpose. Simon didn’t like her working at Atkins. He didn’t like her working at all, said that he earned enough money for her not to have to work. When Laura complained to other women, they all laughed and said they wished they had husbands like that. But they didn’t understand. Simon wanted a wife who would clean and cook and
bake. A wife who arranged flowers and managed to look beautiful even while she cleaned the toilet. He’d bought her an apron for Christmas, printed with sprigs of lavender. He called her ungrateful when she asked him what century he thought he was living in and threw it in the bin. For three years she’d put up with rude, stupid, impatient customers, because it was better than being at home.

“Mrs Cullen?” Robert Wain was leaning towards her, trying to do his concerned look—the one where he pretended the company liked to care for its employees. Laura stood up and concern snapped to impatience. “I haven’t said you can go,” he barked.
She shrugged. “I won’t be coming back. I’ve had enough.” There would be another job.
“No. Wait. Please.” A large hand on her shoulder. “Take some time off. Go and see the doctor tomorrow. Ask to be signed off for a week or so. I don’t know what’s wrong, but you’re obviously in no fit state to work. We don’t want to lose you.”

Nodding, because it seemed to be the only way to shut him up, Laura went to the cloakroom and collected her coat and bag, then went straight to the steps. The man had gone.

When she finally got home, after spending an hour waiting for a bus, the house was empty and cold. Simon must have gone to visit the friend he had mentioned. Shivering, she kept her coat on while she turned on the heating. He had been painting his model aircraft after he finished his lesson preparation. The pine dining table was covered with sheets of newspaper, tiny paintbrushes, small pots of paint, and miniscule plastic pieces. Some day, Laura resolved, she would tell him it was an inappropriate hobby for a thirty-five-year old man.
Pouring herself a large glass of wine, she walked upstairs and undressed to take a bath. Purple bruises were starting to emerge over her ribs and on her buttocks.

Lowering her aching body carefully into the bath, she took a sip of wine and stretched out. She had sprinkled the water liberally with lavender oil and breathed in the relaxing scent gratefully. With each breath, the stress of the day began to recede. She would find another job. She was quite proud of the way she had behaved. Seeing something as basic as the need for shoes had altered her perspective, and she knew that she would never again worry about finding the right fragrance for her air freshener or the right shade of cushions for the conservatory. Another sip of wine. She put the glass on the windowsill and closed her eyes.

The baby was still crying. She walked up and down beside the narrow, metal-framed bed, rocking him gently.

Laura’s face had slipped beneath the water’s surface. Gasping, she sat up, still hearing a baby’s persistent cry, still feeling the anxiety of a young mother unable to comfort her child. She grabbed a towel to wipe the water from her eyes and tried to focus on what she could see around her. Sage green walls, tiles in a regular pattern of black and grey. Just a dream, she told herself, just the random activity of a tired brain trying to rationalize the events of the day. Nothing more. She took a gulp of wine, coughing as it burned her dry throat, and let her eyes close again, this time keeping her arms on the sides of the bath to support herself.

The bed creaked as Tom struggled to sit up. He held out his arms and she handed the baby to him. As he rocked him gently, the piercing walls began to subside.

Laura felt tears slipping down her cheeks. She had dreamed of a baby before. Her baby. A promise that was never fulfilled.

A key scraped in the door and she wiped her face quickly. Tears would take too much explaining. Simon’s familiar heavy, measured tread climbed the stairs and went into the bedroom. After a moment, she heard him opening drawers and cupboards. She called his name, but was not surprised when there was no alteration in
the rhythm of his movements. Hard to hear her with the door closed. Reluctantly, she climbed out of the bath. It sounded as though he was looking for something, and if she didn’t help she knew he would empty the contents of all the drawers and cupboards onto the bed and then leave them there for her to tidy up. She dried herself quickly and wrapped herself in her pink dressing gown, wincing as she tied the belt around her aching side, and walked to the bedroom.

“What are you doing here?” Simon turned quickly as he heard the door open. He had thrown some t-shirts and shorts into a large suitcase balanced on the bed.
“I live here,” Arms folded, Laura sat on the edge of the bed and watched him.
“Very funny,” An attempt at a smile flashed across his face. “You’re home early.”
“Yes.” Now did not seem to be the moment to tell him why. “Are you going somewhere?” She told herself she probably imagined the slight hesitation before he spoke.
“Work,” he replied, turning towards the wardrobe. “Have you seen my new white shorts?”
“Top left shelf,” she said automatically. “And in case you hadn’t noticed, it’s Sunday. I know you’re a dedicated teacher, but I think you’ll find school will be closed today. So where are you really going?”
“Spain.” He kept his back turned to her, stretching to reach the shorts. She noticed that his wavy brown hair was wet. It must have started raining.
“What?”

For a moment, Simon stood still. Then he turned and walked quickly towards her, pulling her to her feet and holding her against him. “I’m really sorry,” he murmured. “It’s one of those last minute things. Unavoidable.” He held her firmly around the waist. She bit her lip, trying not to let him see she was in pain.

“Listen,” he said softly. “It’s a school trip. Clive was supposed to go, but he’s been taken ill and they need an extra body to keep up the teacher to pupil ratio. You know how it is. So I have to go instead. I need to be at Manchester Airport in three hours. I’ve just been round at Clive’s, getting all the details off him.”

“A school trip. In February? Do you think I’m stupid?”
“Cheaper. Saves the school a fortune if we go this time of year.”
Laura pulled away from him and studied his face. His cheeks were flushed and he was breathing heavily.
“So,” she said slowly, “what’s wrong with him?”
“Who?”
“Clive, of course. You said he’d been taken ill.”
“Oh! Flu, I think. I didn’t get to see him, I talked to his wife. She said she didn’t want to risk me catching whatever it is he’s got. They’re going to get a doctor out tomorrow to get a proper diagnosis. Now, I really have to get ready. I have to catch a plane full of giggling teenagers. What fun.”
“You’re lying,” Laura said calmly.
Brown eyes widened like an injured dog. “How can you say that? Have I ever lied to you?”
She had to admit that he never had. But, as she told him, there was always a first time.
“I’ll only be away for two weeks.” Simon kissed the top of her head before he turned back to the wardrobe.
“You’ll be ok without me. I expect you’ll enjoy the peace and quiet. Now, have you seen my cream trousers?”
“No!” she snapped. “Find them yourself.”

She took her wine downstairs and curled up on the sofa. He came down a few minutes later with his suitcase and a small flight bag, wearing his best navy overcoat and the striped grey and white cashmere scarf she had bought him for Christmas.
He stood awkwardly at the living room door.
“You’ll be too hot in that,” she observed, making no effort to get up.
“It’s not that warm over there this time of year. And I’ve got to get to the airport yet. I don’t think Manchester will be particularly toasty.” He stretched out his hand. “Aren’t you going to come and kiss me goodbye?”
She shook her head.
“Laura, don’t be like this.”
“Like what?”
“Difficult.”
“What did you expect?”
“I expected you to be reasonable. And to trust me. Look, I really have to go. It’s only for two weeks.” He smiled and picked up his suitcase. “You’ll be fine. There’s money in the joint account for bills and food and stuff. Use whatever you need.” He started to open the door and then stopped.
“I’m sorry. I forgot to tell you...”
She fixed her gaze on the back of the sofa.
“I broke a mirror.” Simon fiddled with the worn handle of the suitcase. “In the bathroom. The little one. I was in a hurry, I’m afraid.”

Laura chose not to reply. Silence followed the door slam. The house seemed to let out its breath. As she brushed up shards of glass from the bathroom floor, she caught sight of her reflection in one of the larger pieces. If she turned the glass this way, that way, tilted it slightly, her face altered and she became someone new. Suddenly entranced, she started to fit the pieces of glass back together, like a jigsaw puzzle. A stranger stared back at her. A monster. A lined, jagged face. She almost expected the broken mouth to open and ask who she was.

An hour later, as she and her friend Carol started on their second bottle of wine, two weeks without Simon was starting to look like a very attractive prospect.
“IT’ll do you good,” laughed Carol. “You could do with some time on your own.”
Carol had been Laura’s friend since primary school, and this evening she had seemed the obvious person to call. Resting her wine glass on the arm of the sofa, Laura stared at the ceiling.
“What if he doesn’t come back?” she mused.
“Would you care?”
Laura sat up and stared at Carol, who was sitting cross-legged on the floor.
“What sort of question is that?”
“An honest one. What else would you expect from me?”
Laura looked away. “He’s my husband.”
“And?”
Laura let out her breath slowly, thinking that the only problem with having a best friend you had known since the age of four was that sometimes they knew you too well.
“Let’s say it wouldn’t be the end of the world,” she said at last.
Carol poured some more wine for them both. “Why did you marry him?”
“You know why.”
“No.” Carol shook her head forcefully. “I know you were pregnant and I know that’s why you say you married him, but...”

Laura leaned her head back against the sofa and her eyes moved to the silver-framed wedding photograph that stood on the coffee table. She and Simon had married five years ago, after they met on a cruise ship, while she was working as a dancer. He had bought her a drink after a show. A music teacher, he shared her understanding of the language of rhythm and time signatures. And when he had told her where he worked, she had spilt her drink all over him.
“I’m so sorry.” She remembered her embarrassment as she tried to dab the spreading stain of red wine from his checked shirt.  
But he had laughed. “It’s ok. I didn’t know teaching in Christleton was such a big deal.”  
When he found out Laura had been born there, they had spent the rest of the evening talking about the village she had moved away from to live in London. And throughout the rest of the cruise, there seemed to be so much else to talk about, so much to discover about this quiet man. So when she found she was pregnant, it seemed a sign that blessed their future together.  
Now she glared at Carol and shook her head.  
“I couldn’t have carried on working,” she protested. “Not with a baby.”  
“You’re a survivor, Laura.” Carol leaned back on her elbows, watching her. “Always have been. You’d have coped on your own.”

And she would. But marrying a man who was kind and quiet had seemed like such a nice thing to do.  
When she moved into the house he owned, just outside the village, it felt like coming home. They had settled into a comfortable, cosily existence while they waited for the baby to arrive, feeding ducks by the pond, watching laughing children dance around the maypole at the summer fete.

And then one morning she had woken to stabbing pain and a bed wet with blood. Their future shifted, blurred. And between them had grown an empty space that neither would cross.  
“When you married Simon,” Carol went on, “you started to disappear. Somehow you weren’t you any more. What you did today, helping that man, that was you. The old you. You need to let that happen more often.”

“And lose my job more often?”  
“Oh, come on, Laura!” Carol laughed. “That job was never right for you. You deserve more than that.”  
“So did he,” muttered Laura, remembering the man by the steps. “And you know the awful thing? Any other time, I’d have just walked past him. If I hadn’t fallen down the steps and landed on him...”

She started to giggle. Carol joined in. For a few minutes, the two women were helpless slaves of their laughter. Laura wiped her eyes.  
“Oh, I’m sorry,” she gasped.  
“I wish I’d seen it.” Carol grinned. “But seriously now, you know I don’t think anything happens by chance.”  
“You mean there’s some divine entity that likes me to be covered in bruises?”  
“I mean that you were meant to meet him, because it’s made you re-think your life. Now, while Simon’s away it’s time for you to have some fun. Whether he comes back or not, you’ve got at least two weeks without him. So have a break. Enjoy yourself.”

Laura smiled. “I think I’ve forgotten how.”  
“I know you have. And I know where you can start.” Carol was rummaging around in a huge, orange fringed bag. She was a textile artist who loved bright colours and often wore her own designs. Tonight, embroidered purple velvet trousers fought with a lime green sweater. A gleaming curtain of pink hair swung over her flushed face as she tried to find what she was looking for.  
“Here we are!” she exclaimed, turning back to Laura and holding out a crumpled leaflet. Laura took it cautiously and smoothed it out. Green print on heavy cream paper. An alternative therapy centre called Visions. An extensive list of treatments and activities—crystal healing, yoga, massage, hypnotherapy, rebirthing, ear candling...

“It’s not really my sort of thing.” She tried to smile as she handed it back.  
“A massage would do you good,” said Carol firmly. “You deserve a treat. I’ll pay if you like. Call it a belated Christmas present.”  
“No! It’s fine. It’s not that I can’t afford it, it’s just...”

“Well, I’ll leave it here for you to look at,” said Carol, standing up. “And now I have to go.”
“I’ll call you a taxi,” said Laura, trying to stand and wishing she had drunk the wine more slowly. She had forgotten to eat anything.
“No, it’s fine.” Carol laughed and pushed Laura back into her chair. “I’ll call you, ok?”
Laura nodded, closing her eyes.

The pub stank of stale cigarettes. The red seats were threadbare and shiny. But at least it was warm. She jiggled the baby on her knee and pulled his torn blanket closer around him. Tom returned from the bar, carrying a glass of cider. He sat down beside her and nodded towards a tall man with pock-marked skin who stood in a dark corner.

Discover all our author's books in one convenient place: www.talesfromwales.net/bookshop.htm
SYNOPSIS
After the death of her grandmother, young novice priestess and healer, Ceridwen, is faced with the daunting responsibility of ministering to her Celtic tribe, at a time when spiritual leadership is most needed. It is over two hundred years since Roman invaders attempted to annihilate the Druids on the shores of the Island of Mona (Anglesey in North Wales). Is now is the time for healing and forging a future from that hateful carnage? Is her attraction to a Roman surgeon, Marcus, a weakness, or her destiny? Dare she allow herself to be drawn into a relationship with him, now that she will be expected to mate at the sacred time of Beltane; and how can she steer her tribe away from its current chieftain, who usurps the nobility of Celtic leadership in exchange for a reign of intimidation and terror? Their lives entwine and unfold in the setting of Mynydd Llwydiarth - the sacred mountain on the island of Mona. Charged with passing the secrets and wisdom of her Druid training down the generations through the female line, she questions why she cannot conceive a girl child. The true magic she comes to learn, as her life unfolds, is more about love and loyalty than ritual, more about justice than tribe. Interpreted as an allegory of the era we live in, where there are clashes of both culture and ideals, we can empathise with the process: but, for both Ceridwen and Marcus it is an agonizing spiritual journey of self searching and response to their times. ‘Where Rowans Intertwine’ is a historical novel which will interest those who enjoy a mystical tale, a spiritual quest, and a dip into the past. It will fascinate those interested in things Celtic, Druid, Roman or Pagan, and create an awakening to healing and life purpose.
CHAPTER II

~ 0 ~

CAE GWYNION
THE HOLY PLACE

The breeze was so gentle that day, a caressing promise of Spring to come. As Ceridwen trod the heather, gathering kindling in her apron, the scent of newness seemed to be released all around her. For the first time in months she threw off her purple woollen cloak and lay down on the mountain, determined to take a well-earned rest from climbing and collecting.

She breathed the heady freshness of the day, a mixture of sea and mountain air with the scent of pine, oak, heather, gorse and fern all around her. This was her favourite spot; a clearing on a rocky outcrop of the mountain, warmed by the noonday Sun and sheltered from the Irish Sea. From this vantage point Ceridwen could truly imagine she was powerful, like the Goddess whose name she bore.

Although only five hundred feet above sea level, the vista from this part of the island was incredible. It was as though she could reach out and touch the sacred summit of Yr Wyddfa, the highest mountain on the mainland, and the Lleyn, stretching like the great body of a dragon, its barbed lashing tail the southernmost tip of the peninsula to the South. The forested valleys below, dotted here and there with a farmstead, or newly planted fields and grazing lands, seemed sleepily accepting of their subservience to the mountains of Eryri.

Ceridwen watched the mist rising from the straits, a brief band of tidal water cutting off the island of Mona from the mainland of Eryri. As she did so, she fancied she saw the spirits of her Druid ancestors, slaughtered by Agricola and his Roman military machine, arising from their watery graves to defend once more the Druid stronghold of Mona.

She knew she must be silent and keep to herself the deep scar of resentment she held for these Roman invaders, whose Gods had proved mightier than all the ancient Druid wisdom and who now took what they needed from the land; their copper, their gold, their corn, their meat, to feed the now dwindling garrisons.

Resistance had proved futile and unprofitable. The Romans had much to offer; employment, trade and a way of life, which some of the Celtic chieftains were unashamedly copying. The Celtic nouveau riche had a way of alienating themselves from their local tribes-people by building spacious villas with tiled floors, bathhouses and slaves to take care of the daily upkeep; but there was still a core of stubborn chieftains, too proud to capitulate. They kept their fortresses well manned with warriors; enough to keep the Roman garrison on the mainland at Segontium, near the mouth of the Seiont, on its toes.

Ceridwen found herself tensing, irritated by the thought of her kinsman Ethig, the young, hotheaded chieftain of the Celwri. Lacking the inherent wisdom of his father, he enjoyed playing cat and mouse with the Roman legionaries based along the coastal hill forts. Ceridwen suspected that he would go too far one of these days and stir real trouble for the local tribes-people, who were trying to keep a low profile and get on with the task of feeding their families and nurturing the land.

She had to hand it to her father and brothers. They were past masters at negotiating deals with either side. As long as their trade in mountain ponies and corn did not suffer, they were wont to make a show of sympathising with either side, in an effort to keep the peace.

‘No point sulking,’ her father Gwilym would say to the younger menfolk. ‘We may as well profit from the Romans being here, as kick up a fuss and end with our tribe annihilated.’
She could see them now, working on the tract of land shared by the tribe in the valley below; her brothers Coll and Owain reining in one of their frisky mountain ponies, which would soon be broken in sufficiently to ride; her father, Gwilym, ploughing a long furrow for the spelt wheat, driving old faithful Tergmud in front of him, halting the old ox now and again to realign the furrow ploughed by the wooden ard.

He was breathing heavily now, wiping the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. Although strong enough for his age, his muscles thickened and taut with a lifetime of physical labour, he was finding the daily toil beginning to take its toll.

The lads would have to manage more of the farming, instead of concentrating on breeding and training their ponies. After all, they kept an expanding slave family to help with the never-ending tasks, which their growing enterprise demanded. They should be able to manage if he were to take more of a supervisory role. He would just make sure of the measure of the first furrow; then leave the rest of the field to the bondsmen. He had to show them there was life in the old dog yet.

Ceridwen smiled with amusement. Even from this distance her father’s dogged determination showed in the grim line of his body and sheer effort he was putting into the task. He certainly set an example to the young ones. He seemed to thrive on hard work; yet he sometimes proved to be such an exacting taskmaster that no one felt they could compete to his standard. It was as though he strove to stave off his journey into old age by keeping up such momentum.

As the midday Sun grew hotter, Ceridwen knew that they would head back to Tan Yr Aur, the farmstead with its group of circular huts in an enclosure of blackthorn and wattle. They would sit under the thatched awning of the main hut and be served cold spring-water and mint, barley cakes and honey. Her mother, Marged, would fuss around the men like a clucking hen and they would joke and gossip together, planning what they might do to teach Eithig a sound lesson.

As priestess of the Celwri tribe and guardian of Cae Gwynion, the Holy Place, her grandmother, Old Nanw, kept a keen eye on their antics and gave counsel where she knew the situation could easily get out of hand. But Nanw was getting no younger and gradually Ceridwen, as her grandmother’s apprentice, would take over the work of leading the worship at the festival rites, of performing pathworkings and spells, of healings and herb medicine. At the age of five, Ceridwen had left the farmstead of Tan Yr Aur in the fertile valley below and had become a constant companion to her grandmother, whose hut nestled close to the holy ground at Cae Gwynion on Mynydd Llwydiarth, or Purple Mountain as the rocky outcrop, nestling in a band of birch, oak, ash and rowan, was known.

Life with Old Nanw was so different to the urgency of life on the farmstead. There was still plenty to do at Cae Gwynion, but there were only two mouths to feed. Between planting vegetables and herbs, repairing the leaking thatch and tending the goats, geese and chickens, there was time for chanting and repeating old spells. There was time to use hands in the time-honoured way, time to soothe old grievances, revenge old grudges, foretell the fortunes of the passer-by, tell old history to furtive pilgrims, and most joyously, since the onset of Ceridwen’s days of fertility at thirteen, she had been allowed to help with the birthings.

Occasionally Ceridwen was filled with regret that she had left the bustle of the farmstead for the quiet of the hut at Cae Gwynion, but most of the time its sheer peacefulness was food and drink to her. Whereas Marged, her mother, had to be highly organised in the daily running of the farmstead, handing out instructions with the efficiency and authority of a Roman general, Old Nanw would rise, wash and pray in an unhurried fashion and, once they had got the fire stirred and glowing healthily, she and Ceridwen would consult together about the structure of their day.
Today they had risen at dawn and had begun by sweeping the interior of the cottage, laying fresh sand and dried sweet smelling herbs on the rock floor, asking a blessing on their cleansing work from the Goddess. When the work was finished, they had shared a bowl of barley gruel, which had been slowly simmering in a large iron pot slung over the fire since the night before. Then Ceridwen had drawn water from the deep well behind the cottage and put it in the large clay retaining pot by the threshold.

Old Nanw had set off for the farmstead with some remedy for an ague, plaguing one of the bondswomen at Tan Yr Aur; whilst Ceridwen had subdivided what seemed to be a hundred perennial herbs, and bedded them into a new patch of recently dug and composted earth. It was one of those jobs, which should have been done at Samhain in the Autumn to give the roots a good start over Winter, but they had been busy with birthings and an epidemic of rashes and those had had to take priority.

A few days earlier Coll and Owain had been up to turn over the midden, establish a new midden area and dig out a fresh patch for Nanw’s precious herbs; for although there was a plentiful crop of useful plants growing wild on Mynydd Llwydiarth, it was much easier to have them to hand in abundance and variety near to the hut. By noon Ceridwen had become in need of a change of activity and had decided to walk the mountain collecting wood. She had ambled through the Ancient Burial Ground, asking for the strength and wisdom of her predecessors as she wove a path over the mounds of earth covered tombs, where urns bearing the ashes of her people were interred.

She doubted whether she would have the courage to pass alone in this place at dead of night unaccompanied, but in the strong sunlight, bedecked with bright yellow gorse, the serenity of this sacred spot seemed to fill her with its beauty; rising from the earth energy, through her feet, moving through the core of her body and out towards the sky, with its wheeling birds playing on the wind.

She came to the Holy Oak Grove on the breast of the mountain. The budding branches of newly established oaks, struggling to make a statement about forever, swayed courageously in the light breeze. Two hundred years ago it had been the centre of Druid learning, a secret place for learning secrets, a place of dedication to the Gods, a place of worship and healing. Now, although the commote used it regularly for festivals, there was a forlorn abandoned feeling to the place that had at one time pulsed with the daily chanting of the Druid novices and their teachers.

After the massacre of the Druids on the Straits of Menai, the Roman invasion of Mona had sought to obliterate any trace of the Ancient Order. The grove of ancient oaks was one of several on the island, which had been levelled in an attempt to eradicate the power centres of the Druids.

The timber was used to rebuild the structure of an old hill fort on the summit of Mynydd Llwydiarth, where a small Roman garrison was installed to watch for Irish raiders invading from the sea, or insurrection of the rural tribes-people from the land below. But Druid thinking could not die. It was too much a part of the farming year. The feasts and festivals continued... the rites... the patterns of healing... the magic... the customs. These could not be killed off as efficiently as people.

As the fear of insurrection had waned and the Celtic and Roman peoples began to live side by side, some even intermarrying, the two cultures rubbed along well enough; finding similarities in their Gods and festivals; tolerating each other for the sake of survival and trade, and occasionally, when needs must, celebrating their feasts together.

There were ways of preserving customs; handing down the old traditions by word of mouth; chanting the old wisdom using runes and rhymes, so that the little ones absorbed their rhythm and melody at the breast and played them as games whilst still children.
Ceridwen had learned her lessons well. She had a love of chant and a mind as sharp as an arrow. Her memory rarely failed her and by four years of age she had been able to join in the festival chants and dancing as though she had learned them in some previous life.

When Nanw had claimed her as her successor, she felt in her bones it was her destiny. To be the hub of the wheel of their tribal society meant empowerment, dedication and hopefully the growth of wisdom accompanied by assured humility.

Ceridwen stretched luxuriously in the warm Spring sunshine. To be young; to be healthy; to be part of all this beauty; to be at one with it all; surely this is why she had been given life; to appreciate her everlasting essence; to nurture it and help others to nurture theirs? She was feeling the responsibility of her station without the heaviness of burden, for she was but nineteen. Reaching out for maturity was an exciting part of life's adventure. She gazed at the wisps of white cloud spread gently over the blue of the Spring sky. A pair of buzzards was playing on the warm air currents, effortlessly suspended with their great wings outstretched in total trust of being carried higher and higher into the warm sunlight.

'We should trust in the Goddess as these marvellous creatures trust in the winds,' thought Ceridwen. 'When we are at one with all things there is such peace and beauty here on Earth.' She must try to remember the teaching of the Old Religion whenever the resentment and hatred in her heart began to burn...Hatred never ceases by the arrows of hatred. It shall be conquered only by the darts of love. She began to chant it and play with the melody until it was carried on the breeze and reached the creatures around her. It was as though the mountain itself was responding to the prayer, yearning for the love and dedication it had witnessed in times gone by.

Ceridwen danced as she chanted so that the lines and rhythm of her body helped the chant to swell and flow. It was a gift of love to her Goddess, the Mother Goddess who gave birth to all that is beautiful. A bramble caught at her leg like a jealous maiden, who had not yet learned to dance. Ceridwen bent to wipe the scratch with her own spittle.

'Yes, even you are beautiful when you give us your flowers and fruits at the end of the Summer.' She was determined that nothing would take this benevolent mood away from her on such an exquisite day. But as always, when one is confident that something will last forever, she was immediately tested. Was that a glint of sunshine flashing on burnished metal below her? There was movement near to where the spring found its path through the rocks towards the underground source of the well at Caer Gwynion. Could it be a foot soldier from the Roman based hill fort over the mountain ridge behind her? What was he up to...poisoning the stream perhaps, or just intruding?

Ceridwen felt hot anger well up inside her and, dropping the kindling, she hurled herself down the mountain, missing her footing more than once, scratching her bare legs this time on the sharp gorse.

She scrambled to where she had fancied she saw the glinting, wary now in case she should be attacked from the rear, but, whoever it was, was now pushing up through the bracken and heather well above her, wearing, as she had suspected, the helmet of a Roman legionary. Whatever he was doing he had left evidence behind him, for a soft pigskin bag, which had seen better days, lay in the path of the stream.

It was heavy and sodden as she pulled it clear of the water. With difficulty she loosened the drawstring and seeing the contents fell sick to the stomach. 'Ye Gods! Have you Romans no respect for life. Must you always kill what is beautiful! I hate...' she paused and checked her tirade, which had begun to echo back to her from the other side of the valley. Priestesses in training were supposed to gain control of their emotions and see best how to mend all things.
She steadied her breathing and cleansed her mind with a prayer. Gently she drew each tiny furry body from the bag, each with the tight-shut eyes of the newly born and the relaxed soft limness of the newly dead. She drew all six kittens into her apron and sat peacefully on a mossy stone, sending their spirits towards the Great Earth Mother. Her own outrage must wait. She must recycle their life force into something equally beautiful. It was then Ceridwen felt the familiar throbbing in her hands, the call of life force upon life force. One of the kittens was stirring, responding to the great Love Energy flowing from the Earth, through Ceridwen's body and out through her gently positioned hands. A sweet miracle! The joy of being part of such healing was surely a sign from the Goddess that she was doing well with her training, confirmation that this was her true calling. Instinctively she lifted the tiny vulnerable body nearer to her left breast, where the kitten might hear the beating rhythm of her heart. The stream flowed almost soundlessly over the stones and the breeze died to stillness, as if Nature were holding her breath.

The familiar tingling energy in her cupped hands grew steadily and heat, like that of the warm Sun, began to stir the tiny silken form in her hands. For a moment both kitten and maiden were unified in a great glowing. The kitten sneezed and, taking in a gasp of air, began to breathe regularly and normally.

It nuzzled close to her woollen tunic, and for the first time she was able to appreciate its exquisite tortoiseshell coat, the white star on its breast, its four white 'mittens’ and the tiny clinging claws. Gratitude for the life of this beautiful creature welled in her throat and eyes.
SYNOPSIS

What secrets are you hiding?

Haunted by the death of Aled at Worm's Head, his sister Catrin returns to prepare the family home for sale, accompanied by her adopted Deaf daughter, Bethan. A web of lies and secrets spun by Catrin’s father slowly starts to unravel. Catrin, facing a crisis in her marriage, discovers that she must face this past if she is to heal and take control of her future.

Nobody expects to meet Bethan’s birth mother, Elizabeth, who they think is dead. Her arrival at a memorial for Aled sends shock waves through the family.

This is the beautifully told story of a family struggling with ghosts from the past. Hidden Chapters is an optimistic novel about the hope and the courage each of us can find within ourselves to own our past and take control of the next chapter of our lives.
Chapter One

Saturday 30th July 1994

'I've found the girl,' shouted Catrin in panic, her hands shaking as she shone her torch down on the crumpled body. She stepped over the soaking headland grass, reached down and touched the girl's frozen hand. 'Gareth' she called, but her words were drowned by the rain and the sound of the waves crashing on the rocks of Rhossili Bay far below. To the left of the headland path was a fence and fields, but the girl lay on the other side of the path where a grassy area led to the treacherous unprotected cliff edge.

'Come over here!' She screamed to Gareth. To her relief she saw him turn his torch her way. He left the path and came slowly towards her. Gareth knelt down beside the girl, feeling for a pulse. He pushed her long wet hair away from her face. 'She's unconscious,' he shouted to Catrin. The sodden, thin, white, smock dress clung to the girl. As Gareth shone his torch down her body, Catrin saw the neat bump, which had been disguised earlier at the party. 'We must get an ambulance, and quickly,' said Gareth. 'Where the hell is your brother? Where's Aled?'

'I don't know,' Catrin cried, tears now mingling with the rain on her face.
Out of the darkness, a calm detached voice asked, 'Something up?'

Catrin shone her torch beam up and wiped the rain out of her eyes. She saw a man clothed in waterproofs, carrying fishing tackle. He was walking along the path from the direction of the causeway which linked the headland to the island of Worm's Head. Catrin assumed he had been fishing off the rocks by the causeway.

'This girl has fallen,' Gareth shouted. 'She needs an ambulance.'
'Oh, right,' said the man, almost casually. 'I could go and call for one from the hotel up there.'
'Great. Tell them it's urgent. The girl is heavily pregnant.'
Catrin stood up. 'Did you see anyone on your way back here?'
'Yeah. A fellow ran past me. He seemed to be heading to the causeway, I shouted to come back. It's getting bloody dangerous out there tonight. I don't know whether heard me, but he didn't stop.'
'Is the causeway covered by the sea at the moment?'
'Not yet, but the tide will be coming in soon.'
'Catrin, this girl needs an ambulance,' interrupted Gareth. He looked up at the fisherman. 'Please, can you go now?'
'Right, I'm off,' said the fisherman, and he disappeared into the darkness.

At that moment, Catrin heard a feeble voice from the girl. She leant down.
'It's alright. We're here to help you.'
'Where's Aled?' The girl started to cry quietly.
'I don't know,' said Catrin. She stared through the darkness in the direction of the causeway and looked down at the girl. 'Don't worry, I'll go and find him.'

Gareth grabbed her arm. 'You're not to go anywhere. It's treacherous out here. Aled's not a child. He won't do anything stupid.'
'I have to go. Maybe he's lost his sense of direction. It's so confusing out here in the pitch black. Anything could happen.'
'That's why you shouldn't go.'
'Don't worry, I've got a torch, and I'll keep close to the fence,' Catrin said, adding, 'You're the doctor; you have to stay with the girl.' Before Gareth could stop her, Catrin left.
She clung to the fence to stop herself from wandering towards the cliff edge. She was soaked through and shivering now. The rain felt like sharp pins. It was hurting her face. Eventually she reached the coastguard's hut situated at the top of the steep incline which led down to the causeway. In the distance she could make out specks of angry white foam on the peaks of the waves. She pointed her torch down towards the muddy, stony path, then further on to the causeway. She could just make out some rocks, but the sea was slowly devouring the crossing. Catrin screamed out for Aled. There was no reply, so she started to clamber down the slippery path. Catrin managed a few steps but, as she looked up to scream Aled's name again, she lost her footing, fell forwards, and started to tumble out of control down the bank. She dropped the torch, which smashed on to a rock.

Catrin tried desperately to grab at wet tufts of grass, but kept tumbling down, until she crashed into a large boulder which saved her from falling into the gathering torrent below. Petrified, she clung to the rock. She pulled herself up to a sitting position, but continued to hold on. She daren't move for fear of falling again. She knew that the strong currents of the sea covering the causeway would claim even the strongest swimmer. Her right arm, which had caught the main force of the collision with the rock, was throbbing. The pain was excruciating. Catrin just stayed there, hanging on desperately, waiting. She was just starting to despair of anyone coming when she heard her name, and recognised Gareth's voice shouting through the darkness.

'I'm here,' she shouted back. 'Be careful; it's really slippery.'
A powerful light blinded her, and a man in a reflective jacket came and pulled her up the slope. Gareth was waiting, grabbed hold of her and held her close.
'What the hell are you doing? You could have been killed,' he exclaimed.
'I can't find him.' Catrin pulled away from his grasp and shouted hysterically. 'I kept calling. I don't know where he is.'
'You have to come away. It's not safe.'
'I can't. I can't go back without him.'
'This man is with the search and rescue. They'll take over now,' said Gareth.
'No. I can't go back. Not without Aled. My parents will never forgive me.'
'Don't be stupid. The people here have enough to do looking for Aled, without worrying about you,' responded Gareth sharply.

Catrin had to give in, and allowed Gareth and the man to take her back along the headland, through the gate, into the car park. She saw a police car. A police officer walked towards her.
'Where's the girl?' she asked Gareth.
'She's gone in an ambulance,' he said. 'I couldn't tell them anything about her. I gave them your parents' phone number.'

The policeman shone his torch on the gash on her right arm. Catrin saw for the first time that her coat was torn and that her arm was covered in blood.
'You look cold,' said the police officer. 'What's the matter with that arm?'
'It's nothing. I'll sort it out.'
'That needs stitching,' said Gareth.
'No. I have to get back to The Dragon House, to Mum and Dad; tell them what is happening.' Catrin heard a helicopter. She saw the spotlights on the surface of the water, which only emphasised the vast area of black unsearched sea surrounding them. Where was her Aled? Nothing made sense. The one thing she knew was that they had to find him.
"No Pit For You Boy"

A miner he'd been from a very young age. 
a kind loving man, with the odd bout of rage. 
"No pit for you boy" he'd always say. 
Schoolings the way to earn tidy pay.

Being so young, I took no heed.
ever missed school, so could write and read. 
I played the fool and was full of wit.
At 16 I left, followed my dad down the pit.

He wasn't best pleased, and that is a fact. 
flew into a rage, didn't hold back. 
Once he'd cooled down, came back down to earth. 
He gave me his blessing, I could see he was hurt.

For ten years and more, worked side by side. 
got married, had sons, life wasn't easy. 
But the pit was my life, a lasting legacy.

My dads health declined, over the years. 
Dust in his lungs, eyes welled with tears. 
Fighting for breath, in agony and pain. 
His life at an end, but not in vain.

Dad finally passed, peaceful one night. 
I remember those words, yes he was right. 
"No pit for my boys," I whispered to him. 
It's schooling for them, not dust and black phlegm.
After living alone since a teenager, Edith knew it was time to move on, start a new life. The house held many memories for her, but the time for change had come. Edith had recently met someone she knew she wanted to spend her twilight years with and it was time to move on to a new life with her new love.

Emptying the attic, she found the old school books which held forgotten memories for her. With dust covering them, the reflection of her past life would include her school years. Looking through each book, she passed blank pages, where she was unable to carry out the set tasks from the teachers. If only she had done the work then, she may have had a better life and not be where she was today.

Finding her English book, she opened it to more blank pages. Holding it close to herself, Edith searched the attic with her eyes, seeing it transform into the familiar surroundings of her English class from yesteryear.

Mr Tippett stood at the front of the class. 'Would you like to read please, Edith?' he asked, as she daydreamed. Looking up at him, she felt confused. 'What did he want her to do it for?'

"Edith, get out of this class now!" he shouted, raising his arm towards the door, 'go to see the headmistress.'

The class watched her quietly leave. Closing the door behind her, Edith walked the long corridor to the headmistress’ office. By the stairs – which were her last few steps before facing the music – she heard children near her. Headless, she continued the journey with her head hung.

'Aye look, there's that dumb brunette,' the boy nearest shouted. His friend sniggered. Edith turned her head as she passed. Looking at them after passing, she heard the same boy shout, 'What have you learnt to read today? Hope you can read your own name, even if you can't spell it.' Ignoring them, she concentrated on reaching her destination. She knew she would have to try real hard in school to be able to read and write for her to get a good job when she left. But getting her mind to do what was asked was not easy, and Edith convinced herself she was never to work.

Outside the office, she knocked once, waiting for a reply. Mrs Hoat – the Headmistress shouted, 'Come in.' Entering the office, Edith closed the door softly behind her. 'Sit down, Edith,' Mrs Hoat placed her fisted hands on the desk to raise herself from the chair. Being honest, Edith said, 'I was sent here by Mr Tippett because I wouldn't listen in class.'

'Again!' Mrs Hoat exclaimed, not pleased with Edith's attitude.
She knew the girl sat opposite was clever out of school, but never put any effort into her class work.

‘What’s the matter with you? You are a good child, unlike some of them in your class.’

T’m dumb,’ she cried. ‘I deserve to be with the stupid children.’

‘No!’ came the high pitched reply. ‘Why can’t you put the same amount of effort into your school work as you do in the house? I do my best,’ Edith replied, as she watched Mrs Hoat walk around the desk and pull a typed sheet of paper from a drawer. Placing it in front of Edith, she mentioned, ‘This sheet is a record of who has been to see me in the past week. How many times can you see your name?’

Blankly looking at it, the words formed themselves into one.

‘I don’t know,’ she shouted, before storming from the room.

Mrs Hoat followed, pulling Edith back by the arm before she was able to leave.

‘Come here,’ she said sympathetically. ‘I know what’s the matter with you.’

Edith watched.

‘You’re unable to read or write. It’s nothing to be ashamed of, and will explain how you work so well in the house, but never at school.’

‘No! You are like the others. Calling me stupid,’ she was ashamed a respected teacher could make such a comment to a pupil.

‘I am not calling you stupid. You need help to do your work, but you could do it yourself if you learned to read and write.’

‘No!’ she shouted once more.

‘Read that sheet to me,’ Mrs Hoat pointed at the paper on the desk.

‘I can’t;’ Edith conceded.

‘I can arrange for you to have the help which will stop your classmates calling you stupid. In fact, you would be out of that class and in with your real friends,’ Mrs Hoat tried convincing her to do what was asked.

‘Alright,’ Edith agreed. ‘How long would it take me to be able to read and write confidently?’

‘I cannot answer that question, only you can. It will be up to you to decide how quickly you want to learn. You will be taught at your own pace.’ Mrs Hoat was pleased she had agreed.

Leaving the office, Edith thought about the blank pages she had in her books, and hoped they would soon disappear. She was going to learn how to read and write, which was what she had always wanted. Edith felt born again and given another chance to fulfil the ambitions she required from life.

Sitting in the attic, Edith reflected upon the first thirteen years of her life before returning to the present. God, she had been lucky. The school years were followed by Further Education, which gave her the opportunities she never thought existed. Leaving college, she had gained herself a well-paid job, unfortunately, she had no one to share her life with, until now.

The past had disappeared and her working life was nearing its end, but she would always have those blank pages to remind her of what she was back then, and someone who cares about her to remind her what she is now.

Edith was happy and no one was going to take anything from her.

ABOUT TONY LAWRENCE

I am 48 and have always enjoyed writing fiction. I work as a civil servant full time and use writing as an escape from the humdrum daily life. Tired of having knockbacks when investigating writing groups in my area, I decided to set up my own - which has been running since last summer and now has a regular group of 10 members. My reading habits are varied. I never write what I know about - it's too easy to become 'tunnel-visioned',

Edith was happy and no one was going to take anything from her.
There has been an episode of blankness.

When Ellie returns to consciousness, the first thing she notices is the silence. The buzz of people talking in The Fox and Hounds has gone, but what is more important is that she can no longer hear Dominic, who has been making joke after joke about Ellie’s clothes, makeup and personality. Although this is a relief, Ellie is disturbed by the gap in her memory, the fuzzy feeling in her brain. She wonders if someone has spiked her drink, then remembers that this isn't the first time that she has experienced an interruption in the daytime to her waking-state. In fact, it has become a frequent occurrence over the last few months. Ellie has developed a habit of finding herself somewhere unexpected following her "forgetfulness," as she thinks of it. Where is she this time?

Somehow, she is outside. She is aware of the sun on her back, and feels very warm, considering that it is October. In front of her, what appears to be a uniform blue resolves into sea, sky and a distant coastline on the horizon.

She looks down, and becomes nauseous. Fallen rocks and a vertical edge tell her that she is standing on a cliff. Her reflexes take over, making her clutch at the hard object on which she is leaning. It is a fence. Well, at least Ellie has not been in danger of falling over the cliff. She could have been hurt - no, killed - only through deciding to climb over the fence.

To Ellie's left, a notice with bold red lettering reads, "Danger! Cliff Edge. Keep to the Path." She couldn't explain why, but it's the notice which seems to trigger what happens next.

Images, with the force of a tsunami, flood her mind. She can see Dominic’s sarcastic smile and his latest tattoo of a decapitated woman, only half-hidden by his dirty t-shirt. Ellie is filled with dread: up to now, he has bullied her in the privacy of their home, never in front of his mates. Is Ellie’s life about to get even worse?

She sees herself running out of the pub, getting in the car and driving to Aberglas, without knowing why, except that she needs to get away from Dominic.

Perhaps Ellie should be ready for the next flashback. She should recognise the pattern of her experience following a lapse of memory. She never does.
She sees Don, her first boyfriend, so real that he might be there, next to her. She notices his hair, dishevelled, as always, his asymmetrical grin. She can even smell the sun-screen, which, being fair-skinned, he needed to use in vast quantities. They spent two weeks here in Aberglas, in the middle of July, seven year ago.

The contrast between Don and Dominic causes Ellie to feel jabs of pain that are almost physical. If only she didn’t experience these sudden images from the past, her present life might be easier to bear. Sometimes she feels that her life is like a spool of cine film which has been cut up and re-joined out of sequence, so that everything jars.

She looks at the sea, the drop to the shore, tries to feel what it would be like to clamber over the fence. At the same time, shapes of words seem to be forming in her mind, suggesting that she could turn round, walk back to the car, maybe start her life anew. She stays where she is, clinging to the fence.

Jennifer’s hands hover over the keyboard of her laptop. "I quite like the story," Andrew’s email said, "but I think that you need to take out the preamble. Otherwise, you risk losing your reader’s interest. You can still give the reader information on the character’s background, and I suggest that you do this in the course of the story. For example, Ellie might have flashbacks to her time with Don, before she met Dominic. The use of flashbacks can be a very good dramatic technique."

"Would This Be A Good Place For FLASH FICTION?"

ABOUT ANGELA SAUNDERSON

Originally from an idyllic village in North Wales but have been living in Newport since my late twenties.

I work as an archivist, and am now aged 53. I did write a few poems as a teenager but abandoned this and only started again after a gap of about 15 years. Recently I’ve ventured into short stories as well; it was one of my childhood dreams to be a writer and it’s very satisfying to be putting this into practice, albeit only as an amateur and in my spare time.

I belong to Tony’s group and also attend a writing class run at the wonderful Barnabas Arts House in Newport.
Looking Ahead
Looking forward to the Autumn issue we already have several submissions including, as far as I know, the only English translation of Hedd Wyn’s masterpiece “Yr Arwr” by Leonard Shurey.
Stunning photographs from the camera of Stuart Kear and short stories from the pens of Delphine Richards, Paul Ruddock, and Ian Denning.
Hopefully, with the family’s permission, the issue will also include a contribution by Ian Price who sadly passed away earlier this year
There will also be the usual Author’s Extracts section..
And Finally...

The Spring issue featured a poem by Ifan Odwyn Jones an Australian citizen and spiritual Welshman. Over a period of weeks Odwyn forwarded 'bits and pieces' he had found lying around his hard drive. Having read them I deemed them worthy of publication and a wider audience. This is the result.

Although we have never met I am proud to own Odwyn as a compatriot. He possesses a deep faith and a social conscience, evidence of his native Welsh heritage. His poems and prose reflect these qualities in abundance. All told it is a record of a remarkable and well-lived life.

'Odwyn' is available on Amazon
Anyone seeking to publish their own book would be advised to take a look at Dave Lewis' site: http://www.publishandprint.co.uk/
I will shortly be starting a new job so my spare time will be limited to producing Tales From Wales as long as you want it.
The magazine will only exist as long as writers want to contribute.
For those of you who do please email your edited work in Word format to: phil@talesfromwales.net by no later than the end of July.
As I write the Spring issue has been downloaded over 380 times.
The Llanelli Writers Circle will now be featured in the Autumn issue.