

BRUIN

Brecon Rotary Update, Information & News

[Presidential travels](#)

My trip to Lesotho forms part of the International Learning Experience facilitated by Academic Wales and funded by the Welsh Government Wales for Africa programme.



At a Maseru Rotary Club meeting

The main focus of my placement is going to be the evaluation of the implementation of mhGAP in Lesotho. mhGAP is a World Health Organisation initiative to improve the management of mental health, neurological and substance misuse disorders in areas where mental health services are not well developed. The focus is on training non-mental health specialists in the management of common mental health problems.

[From the blog](#)

At the initial briefings for my trip it was made clear that to get from A to B I could walk or

get a taxi from a licensed private hire firm. What I was strongly discouraged from doing was to drive myself. On arrival, it became clear quite quickly why this advice is given. The road layout is familiar from anywhere else in the world. There are white lines down the middle of the road and at junctions there are traffic lights. There are also evident rules of the road. The problem is that it seems not everyone agrees what those rules are and the traffic lights seem to be regarded as advisory at best. On the whole, people drive on the left hand side of the road here. However, where corners are concerned this is abandoned.

□ Today was the start of the six nations rugby tournament back in Wales. I love the six nations. It is a great competition, there is lots of good natured rivalry and the matches are usually pretty exciting. If I had been at home I would have sat down in front of the TV with my son Iory and we would spend an enjoyable 80 minutes shouting at the screen. Despite various attempts to find somewhere to watch it in Maseru I was unsuccessful. I did manage to get a bit of radio commentary over the internet before that too decided to stop working. Maseru suddenly seemed a long way from Powys.

□ In Quthing I didn't see another white face and it really gave me an insight into being a minority of one.

□ As we were re-entering Maseru we passed through a suburb that Peter announced was "where the rich people live". He said, "You can tell they are rich by the fact that there are two storeys." I doubt many of them would describe themselves as poor because that is how the majority of people live here but by Welsh standards they certainly aren't well off. Life is undoubtedly hard and it is perhaps no surprise that a significant number of people have taken to using illegal drugs, but then the same is true in Wales, so what is our excuse?

- Owen

Tales from the Shed – Part 3



Lucky Escapes !!

The use of a trailer has proved invaluable for both collecting and delivering the larger items donated by the generous public. When Andrew and I collected a large settee from Brynawelon, we didn't realise the difficulty of getting it out through the narrow doors and down the steep steps to the trailer. Pleased with our efforts, we set off for our next collection in Groesffordd, not realising that neither of us had closed the back of the trailer. Up the steep hill past the

Three Horseshoes we went, only to discover the settee was half hanging out of the back of the trailer. A lucky escape!! Thereafter we always checked the trailer between collections.

On another occasion we were stopped by the police for not displaying the correct number plate on the back of the trailer. Fortunately we had a Caledonian flyer in the car, and the lady constable was familiar with the Rotary Club and the good work we do. After some sweet talking from Andrew and eating of humble pie by yours truly, we were sent on our way with a light-hearted caution, a friendly wink and see you on Saturday at the Caledonian Market. Another lucky escape!!

More tales from the back of the shed to follow soon.

- Gareth

The early years of the Castle Hotel, Brecon LD3 9DB

The Normans, counting myself as one of them, invaded most of South Wales, defeating the local rulers. A Norman nobleman called Bernard de Neufmarche received the title of Lord of Brecon and he commenced the construction of the first motte-and-bailey castle at Brecon in 1093, thereby creating later, it is said, the first stone castle in Wales.



Bernard de Neufmarche was of the second generation of conquerors who extended Norman influence into the Marches of Wales. By 1093 De Neufmarche and his knights had defeated the Welsh rulers of south Wales and began to build themselves the castles from which they intended to control their new lands.

What did he build and why did he choose this site? The second question is easier to answer. The confluence of the Rivers Usk and Honddu and the existence of fords across the Usk close by were the chief reasons. Water was useful for defence and for power to drive mills. There was then no bridge across the Usk so the fords were important points on the east-west route between the Norman bases in the east and their further expansion westwards. The upstream ford is still known as Rhyd Bernard.

The earliest castle was of the type known as a motte and bailey. The great earth mound, now in the Bishop's Palace garden opposite the hotel, was the motte on top of which there was originally a timber keep. The bailey or courtyard below the motte extended to cover the present garden and, presumably, part of the site of the hotel; the embankment on the north side can be clearly seen in the garden. Even at this early stage the castle must have been a daunting sight. This is exactly what the Normans intended: a deterrent to subdue the hostile Welsh. The castle soon became the administrative and military headquarters of the great Lordship of Brecon.

Unfortunately there is no drawing earlier than Speed's (1610) and very little archaeological work has been done on the site. There were two entrances plus the postern gate. The main gate faced west overlooking the River Usk. It was approached across a drawbridge and probably guarded by two semi-circular towers and the usual great door and portcullis. From the town direction the castle was also guarded by a drawbridge on the site of the present bridge across the Honddu. These gates were joined by the encircling curtain wall, which enclosed the whole area of the castle. Within these outer defences the most imposing building was the great Hall; this was the social centre of the castle.

The castle was attacked six times between 1215 and 1273. Three of the assaults were successful: first in 1215; then Llewelyn ap Iorwerth destroyed the wooden castle in 1231, but it was quickly rebuilt; he attacked again two years later and again destroyed the castle. The castle was rebuilt in stone by Humphrey de Bohun in the early 13th century. Much of this warfare was part of the three hundred year struggle between the Normans and the Welsh which began with the conquest and lasted until the Glyndwr revolt.



Bernard de Neufmarche was succeeded by his daughter Sybil, who married the Earl of Hereford, and their estates passed to William de Braose. They remained in the De Braose family for approximately a hundred years, then by marriage the Brecon and Hereford lands of the original Lordship were united in the possession of Humphrey de Bohun.

Henry Stafford, the second Duke of Buckingham, had been a supporter of Richard III, but they had fallen out and Henry retired to his castle at Brecon. Here he plotted against the king. His accomplice was a prisoner at the castle, John Morton, Bishop of Ely, after which Ely Tower and Ely Place are named. The duke raised an army to oppose the king but his rebellion failed and he was executed. The bishop fled abroad and joined the Earl of Richmond, who was soon to defeat Richard III at Bosworth and become the first Tudor monarch, Henry VII. The king employed the bishop as one of his most efficient tax collectors; he was the Morton of Morton's Fork. Edward, the third and last duke, was born in Brecon castle in February 1478. He was granted all the honours, titles and lands that had belonged to his father, but was later executed by the second Tudor monarch.

Great houses began to replace draughty castles. It is ironic that when the castle entered this period of decline there is more information about its condition and appearance than when it was a powerful fortress. A survey of the buildings carried out in 1552 contains many references to the repairs that were necessary. The roofs lacked lead and much of the timber needed replacing. However, Speed's map shows a mighty castle in 1610. But many of the buildings on his map are symbols rather than accurate representations of what was there in 1645. Later writers and artists describe and depict the castle as an impressive ruin.

Parts of the castle were put to use. The chapel, dedicated to St Nicholas, was a jail until 1690, when it was demolished. Further information can be found on estate maps of the town, which were drawn in the second half of the eighteenth century. A map of 1761 shows a great Hall with windows and to the west a building with two chimneys. On a plan drawn twenty years later this is described as a bowling green. The castle ruins continued to deteriorate and drew disparaging comments by visitors to Brecon.

However, this sad situation was to change. The Morgan family of Tredegar Park had a town house, now the Conservative Club, its own farm in Camden Road called Sunnybank and other extensive Breconshire connections and their attention was turned to the castle and the house adjoining. Work on repairing the house began in 1809. During the next few years considerable sums of money were spent turning house into hotel. A steel engraving of this date gives a detailed view of the building, which is clearly recognisable as the present hotel. The success of the Morgans' investment can be gauged by the prominence given to the Castle Hotel in later guides. By 1835 an impressive list of coaches called at the Castle Hotel on journeys to London on the Royal Mail, to Aberystwyth, Bristol, Carmarthen and Llandrindod.

- Barry

Profile – Brian Ellams

“I was born under a wandering star,” as Lee Marvin sang. The star stopped over Lichfield on 16 October 1945. At three months I moved to Liverpool with my parents. Father came from Liverpool, so it was a return home for him. The wanderlust ceased for 25 years and then kicked in again with 11 moves in the next 46 years!!

My youth was spent at a Secondary Modern School where I managed to get 6 O-level GCE's. This was enough to apply to the RAF for pilot selection. I duly went to Biggin Hill RAF base where I went through all the tests but failed on my eyesight. As I only wanted to be a pilot I had to think again about my future.

It was the 1960's in Liverpool. The Mersey sound was starting. Should I learn guitar and join a group? I bought a guitar, which has been replaced with several others, but I still can't play. I did however have a fantastic time watching all the other groups such as the Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers, The Searchers, The Fourmost, Billy J Kramer and the Dakotas, The Swinging Blue Jeans and many more.

To progress I thought I would need A levels, so I applied to and was accepted at a High School in Liverpool to take English Literature, Physics and General Studies. After the first year I decided to become a Chartered Surveyor. I was accepted into the College of Building in Liverpool and gave up on A levels.

I eventually went to work for the District Valuer and Valuation Office in Birkenhead, and it is there in 1970 that I met Christine. She was a tax officer and worked in the same building. Christine and I married in 1973 and moved house four times in the Wirral area until in 1982 we moved to Oxfordshire. From 1974 until we moved I was a Special Constable with Merseyside Police.

We moved to Woodstock where one of my neighbours was a Rotarian, but I didn't find out until I joined in 1994. In 1985 we moved to Stonesfield a few miles from Woodstock on the edge of the Blenheim Estate. We were in the village until 2005, when we left for Italy. We moved once in Stonesfield to rented accommodation after we had sold our bungalow and bought our Italian villa in 2003.

Our time in Stonesfield was full of social activities. We became members of the Stonesfield Players with both Chris and I having stints as Chair. I was mainly backstage in the village hall, but I did tread the boards on a couple of occasions. In a play called *To the ends of the earth*. I played a mute assassin called Condor. My co-baddies were in real life a judge, a pilot and a composer. Nick Hooper composed the music for one of the Harry Potter films. Another member has gone on to do some proper acting: Rupert Friend was in *Homeland* and has recently been in the film *Death of Stalin*. My only elevation to stage manager was for a production of *Antigone* in the local church. The director was Sally Wainwright, who at the time was a script writer for *The Archers* but went on to write *The Braithwaites*, *Happy valley* and *Last tango in Halifax*.

I left the VO in 1988 and joined a local firm of agents. In 1989 the American Air Force decided it needed two squadrons of F111's to be based at Upper Heyford. The anticipated increase in noise level led to the MOD acquiring a number of houses. I acted for a good portion of claimants and wound up having my 20 minutes of fame when I was interviewed on Central News. I made quite a bit in fees for the company, so another company asked me to join them. I was made redundant from that company in 1993 because of the financial problems at that time. Council Tax replaced Poll Tax and the VO had to project manage the whole transition. As I was now available, I was approached by the VO for Reading to be Team Leader for the Berkshire Council Tax team. I accepted, of course, so I was back in the Valuation Office.

In 1994 I was moved back to Oxford to take over the Team Leader role for Oxfordshire. It was in that year that I joined Rotary. Woodstock was and still is quite a small club compared to Brecon. Woodstock carried out a number of fund-raising events during the year, the main one being the Blenheim 10K run in the grounds of Blenheim Palace. In 2000 I had the honour to become President. That year I became the first (and, I believe, only) President to take part in the Blenheim 10K. I managed to complete the course before everyone went home. I raised over £700 in sponsorship and the grand total for the day was in excess of £6000. This all went to my nominated charity of SANDS for the support of relatives of children stillborn or dying shortly after birth. I supported this charity because in 1979 our daughter died at the age of 3 and there was no support, save from family and friends.



In October 2005 we moved to Villa Magnolia, Via Nicola, Pieve Di Compresseto in the province of Perugia in Italy. In November 2005 I became the only non-Italian member of Gualdo Tadino Rotary Club. Most members did not speak English, so conversation was

limited.

In 2006 our daughter Zoe moved to Brecon with her boyfriend to live in his mother's bungalow. In 2008 they split and she needed to find her own place. The only solution was for Chris and I to help her buy a property, so we had our first Brecon move into Mill Street. We were spending six months in Brecon and six months in Italy, so in 2010 I left Rotary in Gualdo, as I could not fulfil my club obligations.

In 2013 we had to move from Mill Street as it was becoming cramped. Powys housing said we could go on the housing list and we were flabbergasted when three weeks later they offered us an elderly persons' flat in Newton Green. It needed an awful lot of work, which we agreed to do. We enjoyed our time in Newton Green, but it was a first-floor flat with no outside space, so we decided to see if I could raise a mortgage. The sale of our Italian villa had taken five years and the price had diminished to less than we paid for it.

I had known **Peter** for a long time and was his guest at a meeting in the George. I said that when I was in Brecon permanently I would join the club in Brecon. This I did in December 2016. We moved to Parc Tarell in June last year, a week before Zoe was married in the cathedral. I now look forward to many years in Brecon Rotary Club. The picture is of my president's night in June 2001 at Wadham College Oxford.

- **Brian**

Dates for the diary

19 February	Fun night	26 March	Speaker meeting
26 February	Speaker meeting	9 April	Business meeting
5 March	Business meeting	16 April	Fun night
12 March	Dinner meeting	23 April	Speaker meeting
19 March	Fun night	30 April	Breakfast meeting

Speakers

26 February	Katie Evans, report back on Guides grant
26 March	Roy Garnell BEM* on anti-terror duty during the Troubles
23 April	Julian Atkins, new CEO Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
25 June	Rebecca Chamberlain and Gill Colerick, The Stroke Association

Bottle Rota

19 February	Anthony Edwards	26 March	Howard Hoare
26 February	Brian Ellams	9 April	John Hopkins
5 March	Mike Evans	16 April	Owen Hughes
12 March	Gareth Griffiths	23 April	Anne Ingham
19 March	Carol Herbert	30 April	Peter Jenkins