

November, December 2025 and January 2026

In our October meeting Rev. Dr. Mary Thorley gave an unexpected insight into the Girls' Friendly Society, which was started in 1875 by Mary Elizabeth Townsend to prevent girls falling into prostitution. Not what some of our members had realized when they had joined, back in the day when they were teenagers!

It was initially organised by Bishops and the clergy, uniting women and girls of all ranks and virtuous characters. "Associates" should be church members, but "Members" could be chapel. Girls were met off the train and escorted to King Street, "lest they fall into sin!".

In 1892 Bishop Basil Jones went round the Diocese preaching a Gospel of Purity, "it is a necessary duty." Apparently, Wales was worse than England and lower classes worse than higher. Servants were sent to GFS on their half day off, where they were taught to sew and wash clothes. Employers expected their servants to become full members and after 21 years of faithful membership they would get a card. The highlight of the year was the garden Fete in Abergwili when thousands were invited to raise funds for homes of rest and lodges.

However, society began to change and in 1916 with the 1st World War breaking out the women were making things for the soldiers. In 1925 there were even dances and it became a more social and Friendly Society.

At our November meeting, the Manager of Carmarthen Foodbank, Cath Cork, told us about the work of the Foodbank. She opened her talk by reminding us of Oliver Twist in the novel by Charles Dickens and whilst Oliver was 'imagined' by Dickens the details of the experiences of those living in those times and particularly in the Workhouse were very true. However, none of us expected to see such need in these times. Carmarthen Foodbank is completely non-profit making, being part of Towy Church, working in a group of four organisations dedicated to those in need. The others are the Excel Bowling Alley, Community Money Advice and the Furniture store. The Bowling Alley and the Furniture store are there solely to support the Foodbank which is based behind the Excel Bowl and so far this year, the Foodbank has fed 738 children.

The Foodbank provides a three-day parcel for families, but only on the presentation of a voucher from one of the many agencies with whom they work, such as schools, County Council, NHS, etc. This is to provide a wraparound service to deal with as many of the issues involved in being unable to put food on the table.

Donations come from churches, chapels, schools, businesses etc., as well as supermarkets. In particular, the Foodbank is closely associated with Tesco's from whom they collect three times a week. Every donation is weighed and with Tesco's they price-match the amount of food collected from them, the Foodbank receiving this extra income from Tesco's every four months.

26 volunteers give their time to the Foodbank, without whom it could not function. When the Foodbank is contacted by an agency to let them know a family has been given a voucher, they make up a nutritious pack suitable for the size and ages of the family. They also make up packs for those of no fixed abode and these people may be living rough, but also sofa-surfing or living in temporary accommodation. These packs are specifically aimed at providing the type of food that can be used with little or no method of cooking/heating required. In 2023 seven such parcels were provided, in 2024 sixty-four and up to the end of October 2025, 114 such parcels have been provided.

Jean welcomed members to our December meeting and sympathy was extended to Gill Lewis' family. Gill had died 8 weeks after her husband Dewi. Congratulations to Mair and Viv who had celebrated their Diamond wedding. It was good to see Gaynor after her emergency trip to hospital and best wishes were expressed for her husband's heart procedure the following day.

Members had been asked to bring an item, memory, or anything connected to Christmas. Jean started us off with a touching article she had seen in the Daily Mail. Helen told of her experience with disadvantaged children who clung on to the magic of Christmas, when the simplest thing was exciting. Mair had a poem she felt sometimes described herself. Yvonne also had a poem called "Finding Christmas". Wendy Bowen accompanied herself on guitar and sang a modern carol "See the morning star". Marion Little remembered Christmas when her sons were very young and wanted army uniforms and the problems finding material, making them and their very early rising and wanting to go out to play. Barbara had a Christmas quiz which Jean won. Kim had the story of the Nativity (Drama Nadolig y De a'r Gogledd) written in Welsh by Mererid Hopwood and Tudur Dylan Jones, which illustrated the differences in language between North and South Wales. Vilna told the comic tale of Father Christmas and Rudolph, who wasn't at all well and Santa didn't think he would be able to deliver all the presents, but luckily they landed in a Welsh farm. The kind farmer lent Santa his best sheep and all the deliveries were completed while the farmer took care of Rudolf.

A really varied, entertaining evening which closed with mulled wine and mince pies.

The St Twrog MU is the largest Branch in the Diocese with 39 members. However, not all of our members are able to attend our Branch Meetings. The Branch has therefore decided it will periodically be circulating a newsletter to those members, especially our Indoor Members - keeping them up to date with the news and activities within the Branch. We sadly note the passing of Marilyn Jones, one of our Indoor Members after a long illness and sympathise with Martin and all family members. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

On the 15 January 2026, the Branch held its first meeting of the year - the Annual General Meeting. The following officers were elected:

Branch Leader - Jean Voyle Williams

Assistant Leader - Barbara Quick

Secretary - Mair Rees

Assistant Secretary - Elizabeth Wills

Treasurer - Margaret Rees

Press Secretary - Vilna Thomas

Indoor Member Co-ordinator - Wendy Bowen Beynon

Following the meeting, Barbara Quick had kindly prepared a general festive quiz.

Dates for your Diary

12th February Salvation Army Presentation

12th March Dathlu ein Nawdd Sant/Celebrating our Patron Saint gyda/with Rhian Morgan

24th February 10.30am Wave of Prayer

25th March Lunch in The Falcon to mark Lady Day

9th April Prof. Donna Mead OBE – The Importance of the Welsh Blood Service