

# Update

Newsletter of Wales' Oldest Organisation for Retired People Issue No. 34 May 2019

## Thoughts from the Chair

Dear Fellow Members

It is amazing that as I come to the end of my year in Office I look back over the last seven years as your Chair and wonder what things have changed that impact on older people.



During this period I have had the opportunity of visiting a large number of branches and listen to the things that concern them. I have to say that there are still many items that have not changed at all. We are still receiving reports on the lack of Community and Local Transport which leaves many of our older members trapped in their homes.

This in itself brings on another issue of Loneliness and Isolation which has many ways of affecting us with the resulting ill health and further costs to the NHS.

Our State Pensions are still inadequate with the UK still lagging a long way behind other European countries.

All of this gives you the opportunity of coming along to the National Conference and Rally on 5<sup>th</sup> June in Porthcawl to let us have your views and concerns so we can let the Welsh Government know.

You also have a Local Authority Older People's Champion who you should invite to your meetings to hear for themselves your concerns on Local issues.

I hope I have the opportunity of meeting up with many of you to exchange useful ideas.

Best Wishes **John Davies Chairman**

We are trying to improve our Active Wales newsletter. You will see articles written by people with some influence on older people's lives. This month we have something from our President Baroness Gale, from the Older People's Commissioner Helena Herklots and from the Assembly Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney Dawn Bowden. Look out for a contribution from your own AM in future newsletters.

Please make sure that all Branch members get a chance to read this newsletter. Afterwards, feel free to pass it on to non-members who might be interested.

## Making Wales the Best Place in the World to Grow Older

In April, I published my three-year strategy, which sets out my priorities and the action I will take to help to make Wales the best place in the world to grow older.

My team and I will focus on action to end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well, and will deliver a wide range of work against each of these key priorities.



Alongside this, I will also continue to work with a wide range of partners to influence policy and practice at both a national and a local level; monitor and scrutinise the work of public bodies and hold them to account when necessary; identify, celebrate and promote good practice; engage with older people in all their diversity; and provide help and support directly to older people through my casework

service.

I developed my strategy – Making Wales the Best Place in the World to Grow Older – following extensive engagement and consultation with older people and stakeholders throughout Wales, who shared their experiences, views and ideas about the change needed to improve older people's lives and the ways in which this change could be delivered.

Wales has much to be proud of in terms of its work to improve the lives of older people, and many of the people I met and spoke with told me that growing older has been a positive experience.

This is not the case for everyone, however, particularly those who are most vulnerable, and much more needs to be done so that all older people can have the best possible quality of life, remain active and engaged, access the services and support they need and do the things that matter to them.

As Commissioner, I have a unique role to play in taking forward the priorities set out in my strategy, but I will also be working to encourage others to take these issues on and work together to deliver the changes that are needed, which will only be achieved by a concerted and consistent effort across society.

To read the Commissioner's Strategy and 2019-20 Work Programme, which provides further details of the action she will take and the work she will deliver in the year ahead, visit <http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/strategy.aspx> -

*Helena Herklots* - **Older People's Commissioner**

As before, Branches are encouraged to send in news of their activities to share with others. Photographs are especially welcome. You will find contributions from Darran Valley 55 Club and Seven Sisters Branch in this newsletter.

Individual members can also send in their comments on articles in the newsletter or even their own views on topics of interest to older people. This will help us to make the newsletter a success.

## Life in the Lords

I have been a member of the House of Lords since 1999. I still ask myself "How did I get here?"

I was born the eighth of nine children in the village of Blaenrhondda at the very top of the Rhondda Valley. My father was a coal miner at Fernhill Colliery, just above Blaenrhondda. My mother would have called herself a housewife, but she was much more than that. She seemed to work miracles in making the money stretch from one payday to the next.

She always made sure we had good meals and was such a great cook.

I knew from an early age that there was very little money around.

Blaenrhondda sits at the foot of Penpych mountain. As children it was our playground.

There seemed no danger around in those days. It was a real carefree childhood.

I attended the local village school, and later went to Treherbert Secondary Modern School. I left school when I was 15, which was the normal thing to do at that time, and went to work in the local clothing factory, Polikoffs, which employed over 1,000 people.

I got married at the age of 18 and had my two children by the time I was 22. For a long time, I wanted further education, as I felt I hadn't had a good education even though I was a child who wanted to learn. At that time Secondary Modern Schools



were not really about that, so different for those who went to Grammar Schools. By the time I was 29 I had the opportunity of enrolling for a secretarial course at the Pontypridd Further Education College. I jumped at the chance. The hours were school hours so fitted in nicely as my children were at school at the time.

I stayed there for 3 years and during that time went on to take O Levels and A levels and then applied to get a place at Cardiff University, the only university I could go to as I had to get home each afternoon to look after my children. I was overjoyed when I was accepted and studied for a BSc Econ degree.

During this period, I joined the Labour Party and was active in politics. Following my graduation, I started working for the Labour Party as the Women's Officer for Wales, a job I really wanted. After 8 years I became the General Secretary in Wales and spent 15 years in the post.

By 1999 I had 18 months to go before retiring. Around that time, I had a very surprising phone call which literally changed my life. The Prime Minister Tony Blair wanted to give me a seat in the House of Lords. I was completely 'gobsmacked' 'as they say'!

So, in October 1999 I was introduced into the House of Lords. It's a good place to be, and a great privilege. I can use the voice I have been given to raise many issues I care about from equality for women and girls to animal welfare and raising concerns about people with Parkinson's. 10 years ago, I formed an All-Party Parliamentary group on Parkinson's which I co-chair. My father had Parkinson's which is why I am so interested in the subject. We do really good work, both in the Lords and the Commons, we make sure Parkinson's is kept on the agenda in both Houses, by putting down questions, holding debates, and meeting with Ministers. We have also held three enquiries which have been widely acknowledged especially in the medical profession.

Since 2010 I have had the privilege of being a front bench spokesperson for the Official Opposition. I have had responsibilities for Wales, women and equalities, and am now the Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities something I feel strongly about.

Being in the Lords has allowed me to get involved with several charities as a Patron, which is a great privilege. as it is being the President of Active Wales, something I am so happy to do. I still wonder to this day how a daughter of a Rhondda miner ended up in the House of Lords, but here I am, and I try and make the most of this platform I have been given.

*Baroness Anita Gale*

## WHATS GOT YOUR GOAT?

# Dawn Bowden *A.M* for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney has her say

### GAME OF WHAT?

I feel out of place. I can't join a conversation, I look blankly as people give names I don't recognise. Yes, I am that person who does not watch something called "Game of Thrones". And that programme gets my goat!!

My two grown up sons seem to adore this programme. They are on social media at all times of the day and night expressing admiration for some character, who I don't know, and wouldn't even recognise. Does this make me strange, am I missing out on some great mystery of life?



Now I remember the move from vinyl record to CDs, and being in awe that a small shiny disc could contain so much music. I kept up as we moved from TV to 'satellite' and was thrilled at the range of sport, not least football, I could follow for endless hours when time allowed.

Yet I have not quite kept up with the move to streaming and for smart TVs. And this is where programmes like "Game of Thrones" seem to come in to their own.

Now the really keen people seem to watch US programmes live in the middle of the night, and then take unknown pleasure in threatening to tell the rest of their friends what happened?

They know there is a whole army of people waiting to catch up by 'streaming' the programme when time allows, or in some extended 'festival' of tv watching over their leisurely weekend. I imagine this second group desperately hiding away and covering their eyes. A bit like the "Likely Lads" trying to avoid the football score in that famous episode of their comedy series.

I am not sure what happens to these people if they learn the plot of GoT (as they call it) too soon – are they evaporated by some mysterious force?

So "Game of Thrones" – you got my goat. Now let's get back to watching some football - Match of the Day anyone?

Dawn Bowden AM

# Down and Dirty with the Branches – Darran Valley 55 Club

## ***A contribution from member Bob Terrell:***

We 55's of Deri are very, very merry  
We over 55s live very active lives  
Our meetings are fortnightly and are extremely sprightly  
Starting with tea and coffee and a biscuit if you're lucky.

And if we have a luncheon, when we finish munchin'  
The business meeting commences as our due recompenses.  
The Chairman starts things off making sure the mike's not off by giving a gentle cough.

The Secretary's next with her meticulous text.  
She never is perplexed  
Even if her minute should disappear into the infinite, So accurate is she. That we can all agree.

Our Treasurer follows on. He sings a merry song  
He says during the hush, our funds are still quite flush.

We go on lots of trips to Ross and Wells and  
Weston. We've been to Shakespeare's Stratford  
One day we might reach Preston.

We visit the Millennium Centre a play or two to  
venture We saw the Full Monty, a show we found quite  
saucy The ladies' response was great acclaim!  
They cheered and laughed and showed no shame!  
My blood up to my head was rushing I looked at  
John. We both were blushing!

Now all of this is really due to outings organiser Sue Her  
Spreadsheet is so very neat, accurate and quite complete One  
health and safety you can bet. She's never lost a member yet.

After these and more activities, we finish up with bingo  
All eyes are down with the odd frown as we hear the caller's lingo.

So that's how we use our meeting time. I'll sing it to the  
skies, That Deri 55 Club's the greatest place for you to  
socialise.

## Seven Sisters Branch

Our local Community Council has many retired people involved. They do a lot to enhance our village. Recently we opened a large playground for the children to use. Community Councillors work for all groups in the village and though they have retired from work give many hours of their time for useful projects.

Many of our Branch are members of the Seven Sisters rambling and walkers group. Over Easter they went to Pembroke and walked Maencochog, Eglwyswrn and Bryberian mountains. They have also walked Ben Nevis, Snowdon and keep active walking the local mountains. Standing with her husband Gary is June our entertainment officer who organise our trips and other things to keep us active.



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The new name for NOAPAW

[www.activewales.org.uk](http://www.activewales.org.uk)