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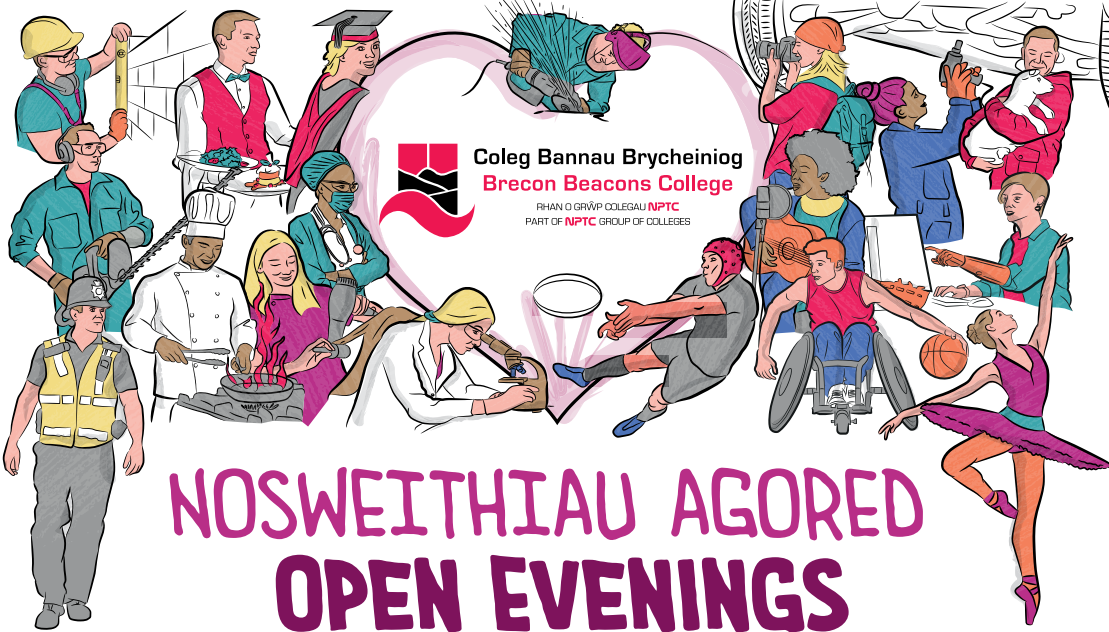
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Dear Readers,

Contents



I have always found immense joy in being creative. For me, it is more than simply a pastime; it is an essential outlet; a quiet, grounding space away from the pace of work and the constant demands of everyday life. It is a way to pause, to reflect and to express thoughts and ideas that might otherwise be lost in the noise.

My own passions lie in journalling and in creative writing. Both allow for freedom of expression in very different ways. Yet creativity means something unique to each of us. It might be painting, pottery, music, gardening, cooking, photography, or crafting something entirely by hand. However it takes shape, the act of creating brings with it a sense of purpose and connection that feels increasingly valuable in today's fast-moving, technology-driven world.

We are fortunate to live in an area where arts and crafts are not only appreciated but truly abundant. There is a vibrant creative spirit here; one that thrives in studios, workshops, community spaces and homes alike. It enriches our local culture and reminds us of the importance of making time for imagination and self-expression.

In this month's issue, we celebrate creativity in all its forms. Whether you are already immersed in your own creative pursuits or simply curious to explore something new, I hope you will discover something that resonates.

As always, thank you for reading and I very much hope you enjoy this month's edition.

Hannah & Pete

Publisher: Focus Magazines Ltd

Tel: 01873 856614

hello@thefocus.wales

Contributors: Alice Brown, Dr Giles P Croft, Elaine Lusted, Jonathan Powell, Kate Thomas

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Residents Fed Up as Potholes Take a Toll on Local Roads



Drivers across the Brecon and Builth Wells area have been feeling the bumps – quite literally – over the past few weeks, as heavy rain has brought a fresh wave of potholes and worsened existing ones. From shattered suspension springs to damaged tyres, even the most careful motorists are struggling to navigate the local roads safely.

In Brecon, several key routes are particularly treacherous. Residents warn that the roundabout near Theatr Brycheiniog has already caused damage to vehicles, with road repairs often proving temporary. The A470 just beyond the industrial estate junction continues to deteriorate, while the stretch from the former Boar's Head past the Cathedral shows daily signs of wear, with multiple manhole covers needing attention. The roundabout by B&M is also highlighted as a spot to approach with caution. Even pavements around town are catching people out, with reports of falls serious enough to require hospital treatment.

"...potholes filled just before Christmas were already back..."

Many locals are frustrated with the temporary nature of repairs. Some point out that potholes filled just before Christmas were already back, and note that the council's approach often involves little more than dumping loose tarmac and tapping it down. Others stress the need for proper machinery like the JCB Pothole machine, rather than "shovel and boot" repairs. Critics highlight the patchwork approach as wasteful and ineffective, while drivers continue to pay higher taxes with little evidence of lasting road improvements.

However, it's not all doom and gloom. Major repair work in Builth Wells is currently underway and is being praised for its thoroughness. Observers note that the efforts are impressive, tackling collapsed drains and long-neglected potholes, with Welsh Water also scanning the area for future work. The hope is that these improvements will make a lasting difference, and residents are keen to see the results over time. Some stretches, such as the road to the new council offices, now boast smooth new surfaces, benefiting both employees and shoppers.

Councillor questions have even been raised about Welsh Government pothole figures, reflecting wider concern about road maintenance across the county. Residents are encouraged to report potholes directly to the council or Welsh Government depending on whether they are local roads or trunk roads, with the promise that this can speed up repairs. Online platforms such as Fill That Hole provide additional avenues for raising awareness.

As drivers weave around broken surfaces, locals are sharing stories, photos, and warnings. From costly vehicle repairs to potential injuries, the message is clear: the roads need proper attention, and sooner rather than later. The community will be watching closely to see whether ongoing work in Builth Wells sets a new standard for tackling Wales' pothole problem.

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New Community Fridge for Crickhowell

Crickhowell has just celebrated the launch of an exciting new community initiative designed to reduce food waste and promote sharing across the town. After many months in the planning and with the financial support for the project given by Cllr Claire Hall and Powys County Council due to her Anti-poverty fund allocation, Crickhowell Community Fridge had its grand opening on 28th February. The project aims to make good quality surplus food available to everyone.

The Community Fridge will be based in Crickhowell Library/Llyfrgell Crughywel which will

provide a central and welcoming location for residents. It is only the start of the great new initiatives planned for the library to make it a community hub and not just a place to borrow books.

The Community Fridge is open to anyone and offers a simple and effective solution to reducing food waste. By redistributing surplus food that would otherwise go to waste the Fridge helps ensure that perfectly good items are shared within the community. The Fridge will be open every Friday from 10am to 12pm giving residents a regular opportunity to both donate and collect food items. It is hoped that local residents will consider

donating excess garden produce in the summer months for example.

By encouraging residents, local businesses and organisations to contribute surplus food, the project not only reduces environmental impact but also promotes a spirit of mutual support. The Community Fridge operates on a principle of openness and inclusivity. No referrals are required and anyone can access the fridge during opening hours. Likewise, individuals and business are encouraged to contribute, provided that items meet safety and quality guidelines.

It is hoped that the Fridge will become a valuable and sustainable part of life in Crickhowell, helping the town waste less, share more, and build an even stronger sense of community.

Elaine Lusted

Crickhowell

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A School Event Embracing Inclusion



In the spirit of unity and understanding, Crickhowell High school are hosting a special event to celebrate Ramadan. This initiative is not only a way to acknowledge the significance of this holy month for our Muslim students and staff, but also a powerful step towards fostering a fully inclusive school environment. Although we only have a small number of Muslim families last year's similar event was a resounding success, bringing together students, teachers and families from all backgrounds to appreciate the values of community, compassion, and cultural awareness.

The Significance of Ramadan and Eid

Ramadan is a sacred month observed by Muslims worldwide, marked by fasting from dawn to dusk, self-reflection, and acts of charity. The culmination of Ramadan is Eid al-Fitr, a joyous celebration signifying the breaking of the fast. Recognizing the importance of this occasion, our school took the opportunity to educate and engage students in meaningful activities that honoured the spirit of Ramadan and Eid.

A Day of Celebration and Learning

The event is designed to be both educational and celebratory. It included briefs led by students at the school teaching the community about the traditions of Ramadan, the significance of fasting, and the values of generosity and gratitude. We also featured storytelling sessions, where students heard personal experiences from their Muslim peers, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of different cultural and religious practices.

As part of this educational evening, we will get to experience the Maghreb call, which marks the call to prayer, signifying the end of the fasting period. We were extremely grateful to be able to watch the prayer in action.

One of the highlights of the evening is the communal iftar-inspired feast, where everyone shares delicious treats typically enjoyed during Eid celebrations. We are lucky enough to have the local community restaurants donate food for the event in true community spirit. We have Turkish cuisine, Indian cuisine, pizza and fish and chips. The experience of coming together over food creates a warm and welcoming atmosphere, reinforcing the idea that food has a unique way of connecting people across cultures.

Strengthening Our School's Commitment to Inclusion

This event is more than just a celebration; it reflects our school's commitment to diversity, respect, and inclusion. By providing a platform to recognize and honour different cultural and religious traditions, we reinforce the message that every student belongs and is valued.

Looking Forward

As we move forward, we aim to continue embracing opportunities that celebrate our diverse school community. This event has set a wonderful precedent, and we hope to build on it by organising similar initiatives for other cultural and religious celebrations throughout the year.

We are incredibly proud of this event and grateful to everyone who contributed to making it happen. By celebrating together, learning from one another, and promoting an inclusive school environment, we take one step closer to a world where diversity is not just acknowledged but truly embraced.



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BANFF Mountain Film Festival: Red Film Programme

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Fri 6 March 2026 | 7.30pm



Sir John Lloyd Lecture: Soil and Surface

A fresh, engaging wander
through Welsh landscapes,
history and the stories beneath
our feet.

Fri 13 March 2026 | 7.00pm



Richard Chappell Dance: AMPLIFY / MWYHAU

Energetic, expressive dance
celebrating Welsh creativity,
community spirit and local
talent.

Thu 19 March 2026 | 8.00pm



Hijinx & Blind Summit: Meet Fred

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Wed 25 March 2026 | 7.30pm



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MARCH@THEATR BRYCHEINIOG



Richard Chappell Dance: AMPLIFY / MWYHAU

A Month of Bold Adventures On and Off the Stage

March at Theatr Brycheiniog brings a vibrant mix of dance, drama, film and homegrown creativity, filling the building with energy as we move towards spring. It's a month shaped by moments that lift the spirit, offering audiences plenty to enjoy as the days begin to brighten, with performances that celebrate imagination, storytelling and community.

We start on Tues 3rd March with the romance and emotional depth of **Royal Ballet & Opera: Giselle**, a classic that continues to captivate

with its beautiful choreography and haunting tale of love and loss. This much-loved production is the perfect way to begin a month filled with artistic adventure. loved production is the perfect way to begin a month filled with artistic adventure.

Adventure takes centre stage on Fri 6th, as the **BANFF Mountain Film Festival: Red Film Programme** transports audiences across continents through epic challenges, extraordinary achievements and breathtaking scenery guaranteed to inspire your next life adventure.

Creativity closer to home shines on Weds 11th, when **Theatr Wildcats: The Weird and Wonderful Talents of Theatr Wildcats** fills the theatre with joyful local spirit. For those who enjoy theatre with insight and warmth, **NT Live: The Audience** arrives on Thurs 12th, offering a witty look behind the doors of the Queen's meetings with her prime ministers, blending sharp writing with heartfelt performances.

The annual **Sir John Lloyd Lecture: Soil and Surface** returns on Fri 13th, guiding audiences on a fascinating journey through Welsh landscapes, history and the stories that lie beneath our feet. Dance lovers can immerse themselves in expressive movement on Thurs 19th, when **Richard Chappell Dance: AMPLIFY / MWYHAU** showcases the vibrancy of Welsh artistry and the strength of community spirit.



The month continues with clever, playful comedy on Weds 25th in **Hijinx & Blind Summit: Meet Fred**, followed by the rousing energy of The Band of **The Prince of Wales: Celtic Connections** on Thurs 26th. March rounds off with the surreal humour of **Chuckl. Comedy Club featuring Milton Jones** on Sat 28th, before closing with the epic scale of **Royal Ballet & Opera: Siegfried** on Tues 31st.

Join us this March, where every performance offers something to spark the imagination.

WHATS ON

6TH MARCH
Book-ish Event
TIM WEAVER –
THE LOST WOMEN



7.30pm, Book-ish Loft, Crickhowell
www.book-ish.co.uk/events for tickets and info

6TH MARCH
Crickhowell High School
RAMADAN COMMUNITY IFTAR



CHS is delighted to open its doors to join our Muslim families break their fast at sunset together. Free Entry. All Welcome.
 Email debs@crickhowell-hs.powys.sch.uk to RSVP
 5:30pm, Crickhowell High School, New Road, Crickhowell

6TH MARCH (AND EVERY FRIDAY)
MUSIC JAM

Hosted by Brecon and District Mind
 2:30pm-4pm, Ty Croeso Community Wellbeing Centre, Free Street, Brecon.

7TH-15TH MARCH
CRICKHOWELL WALKING FESTIVAL



www.crickhowellfestival.com

8TH MARCH
BOARD GAMES CLUB

Join us for the inaugural Board Games Club. All welcomes, refreshments available £3 per adult, £1.50 for Under 16s (to be accompanied by an adult)
 4pm-6pm, Bwlch Village Hall

9TH MARCH
LLANGATTOCK
COMMUNITY HALL AGM

Public meeting – open to all
 7pm, Llangattock Community Hall
 Tea and coffee available from 6.45pm



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12TH MARCH

Book-ish Event MAYA JORDAN – *CHOPSY*



7pm, Book-ish, Abergavenny
Book-ish.co.uk/events for info & bookings

14TH MARCH TALGARTH REPAIR CAFÉ

10am, Talgarth Community Hall

16TH MARCH

Brecon Town Concert Band Present: A SPRING CONCERT

7pm, St Mary's Church, Brecon
Tickets £10 on the door or from any band member

18TH MARCH BRECON BEACONS COLLEGE OPEN EVENING

4.30pm-7pm

See advert on Page 2 for full info

21ST MARCH

Book-ish Author Booksigning ROGER WHITMORE – *SEIKYRE. LEGACY OF THE BROKEN RUNE STAFF*

1pm, Book-ish, Abergavenny

24TH MARCH

Book-ish Event ZAKIA SEWELL – *FINDING ALBION*

7.30pm, Book-ish Loft, Crickhowell
Book-ish.co.uk/events for info & bookings

26TH MARCH HEALTH & WELLBEING DROP IN

For all ages and needs. Services from across the Brecon area will be available to offer you information, advice and support.
10am-2pm, y Gaer, Brecon

28TH MARCH TABLE TOP SALE

10am-3pm, Glangrwyney Village Hall

4TH APRIL

CAR BOOT SALE

Tea, coffee and pancakes available
9am, Talgarth Community Hall
All money raised goes to the upkeep of the hall

4TH APRIL

BRECON CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE SHOW 2026



10am-4pm, Market Hall, Brecon

17TH-19TH APRIL EMBRACING WHOLENESS



A three day women's retreat for rest and restoration
Organised by Body & Earth Somatic Wellbeing

See advert on Page 4 for more info

LOOKING AHEAD

1ST-4TH MAY

CRICKHOWELL MUSIC FESTIVAL

This year will see Crickhowell's 30th Music Festival, opening with Friday's Folk Night and the Kosmos Ensemble, a trio of dazzling virtuosity and impeccable musicianship. On Saturday and Sunday the Choral Society and a star line-up of soloists will perform music by Purcell, Bach, Whitacre and Mozart's revered Requiem Mass as well as hidden treasures from Caldara, Zelenka and Mondonville. Monday's finale brings together some of our much loved former and present music scholars in this, the 10th Anniversary of our Choral Scholars programme promoting young musicianship in the area.

For tickets and more information go to:

www.crickhowellchoralsociety.org

SHARE YOUR EVENTS

Go to thefocus.wales/calendar

A Note about Events

All the events listed are correct at the time of publishing. We strongly recommend double checking dates and times prior to attending an event to ensure these have not changed. Focus Magazines accepts no responsibility for errors or omissions

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The Community Craft Club at BUILTh

Mid Wales is a truly wonderful place to live; rolling hills, small communities and a quieter pace of life. However, it also has its challenges; social isolation, loneliness and disconnected communities. Having moved back to the area a couple of years ago, I decided to do my part in changing this narrative, and provide outlets for locals to connect and feel inspired. Initially, this was a walking group, then a couple of book groups, and finally in late 2025, my latest idea was born; a Community Craft Club.

As an avid crafter, I spend much of my free time creating. It is one of my greatest pleasures, and something I always revert back to when life becomes a little overwhelming. One of the main challenges with this, however, is that this time is spent almost entirely alone. This was one of my main motivations behind the group, along with

fostering an environment where disabled and/or neurodivergent people can feel comfortable and welcomed.

The group is now flourishing, with members attending twice a month and engaging in a range of crafts. The format is simple, based around crafting and connection in unison. Members bring along any craft they wish, spend time making and creating, learning new techniques and sharing inspiration. Still productive. Still enjoyable. Just refocused.

To date, we have had crafters doing lino cutting, card making, painting, sewing, embroidery, cross stitch, felting and many, many more crafts. The impact is significant. Members report feeling more connected to the local community, feeling less isolated and spending some time in a space where demands are low and recharging is prioritised.

New members are warmly welcomed, however booking is essential due to limited space. Experience is not necessary and age is no object. Any members with access needs or accommodations are encouraged to get in touch to discuss this further. The group runs on Tuesday evenings twice a month over two sessions lasting 90 minutes each. Attending costs £3 per person and is bookable via facebook or email.

Alice Brown



PEAK PEERS



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A CREATIVE PROGRAMME FOR PEOPLE AGED 18–30, ROOTED IN THE IMAGINATION OF RURAL WALES.

PROGRAMME DETAILS

Dates: 29 May; 5–6 June; 19–20 June;

3–4 July; 17–18 July; 7 August

Location: Abergavenny and Crickhowell

Eligibility: Ages 18–30

Support: £600 bursary to attend

Application Deadline: 9am, Monday 23 March 2026

Questions: Email ellen@peak.cymru / 07940542611

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Mehefin; 3–4 Gorffennaf; 17–18 Gorffennaf; 7 Awst

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Cymhwysedd: Rhwng 18–30 oed

Cefnogaeth: Bwrsariaeth gwerth £600 i gymryd rhan

Dyddiad cau ymgeisio:

9yb, Dydd Llun 23 Mawrth 2026

Cwestiynau: Ebostiwch ellen@peak.cymru / 07940542611

Apply for Peak Peers 2026:

a Creative Programme for 18-30 year olds in the Black Mountains and Usk Valley

Peak Peers 2024 Photography by Peak Cymru / Zeta Zentella

Applications are now open for Peak Peers 2026, a creative programme for young people aged 18 – 30 years living in Southeast Wales. Hosted by arts organisation Peak Cymru, it offers a unique opportunity for 12 young people to gain experience with artists, theatre-makers, activists and designers. It takes place over four weekends between May – July 2026 and is based at Peak's sites, The Old School, Crickhowell and Abergavenny Train Station, and across the surrounding area.

Peak Peers 2026 has been directly inspired by young people who took part in previous years. Participants said they wanted a programme that helped them imagine new ways to live and build community – and respond to the environmental, social and economic challenges of our time through creativity and collaboration.

"I came away from each weekend inspired and excited about the prospect of working in Wales and building communities." – Peak Peers participant.

Participants in this year's programme will be supported to explore local places and landscapes, take part in creative workshops, and connect with other young people in the region. Themes and mediums will include storytelling, connection to land and nature, sustainable construction, experimental theatre and creative writing.

Who can apply?

Young people aged 18-30 years, living within an hour of Abergavenny/Crickhowell are invited to apply. No creative or artistic experience is needed, the strength of the group comes from bringing together different backgrounds and perspectives.

Further information

To learn more and apply, visit: www.peakcymru.org/peak-peers-2026

To chat to a member of the team, email: ellen@peak.cymru
Deadline for applications: 9am 23rd March 2026

Cost: The programme is free and all participants are offered a bursary to take part.

Peak Cymru is an arts organisation working with young people (aged 14-30 years), artists and rural communities. We are based at the Old School in Crickhowell and Platform 2, Abergavenny Train Station. Visit our website, peakcymru.org or follow us on instagram: [@peakcymru](https://www.instagram.com/peakcymru).

Peak Peers is supported by Arts Council of Wales and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.



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CM Creative

I'm Catherine, a local pet portrait and wildlife artist and the person behind CM Creative. I started to draw during Covid as a way of relaxing and haven't looked back. The creative process gives me focus and makes me happy – it's even better when my drawings also make other people happy.

I've always had pets so know how special they are and the bond you can have with them. I use coloured pencils to create highly detailed pet portraits that capture the character of a pet in an artwork that will last a lifetime. I am passionate about bringing



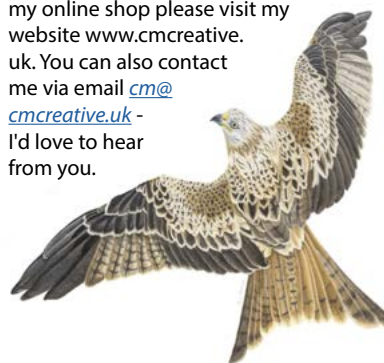
your pets to life and take huge pride in making art that brings joy to my clients.

I have a keen interest in nature, and my wildlife artwork is often inspired by animals and birds I see in the

Welsh countryside. When people see my art it often brings back memories of their own wildlife encounters and I like hearing those stories. I offer a range of cards, gifts and homeware featuring my wildlife drawings. You can see my work in person at The Makers at Craft Renaissance (between Usk and Abergavenny), The Makers Club Cardiff or find me at local craft fairs.

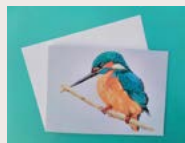
I hold coloured pencil workshops in the local area and this year I will be offering a choice of drawing a robin or kingfisher. I enjoy seeing people tapping into their creativity and, at the end, being proud of their own framed artwork. Please email if you are interested in taking part in a workshop.

If you would like to find out more about pet portraits, see more of my work or buy something from my online shop please visit my website www.cmcreative.uk. You can also contact me via email cm@cmcreative.uk - I'd love to hear from you.



CM Creative

Pet portraits and wildlife artist



Visit my website to see my range of wildlife art gifts or email for more information about pet portraits and workshops.

www.cmcreative.uk cm@cmcreative.uk



Blaen y Glyn Walk

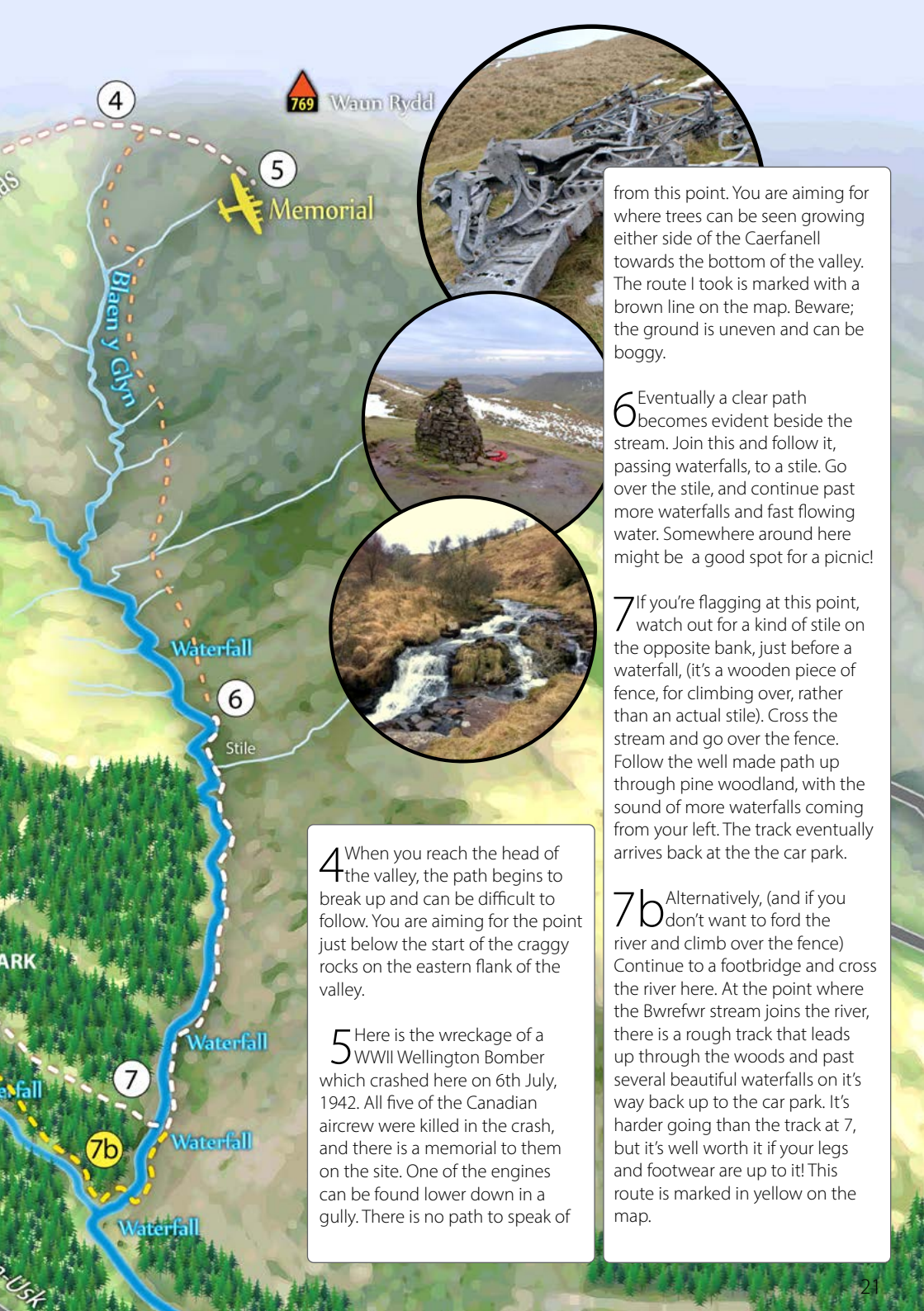
This walk is quite adventurous as there are steep drops and gullies to avoid and sections with no path at all. Proper walking boots are a must. The views are great, and the perspective you get of the giant bowl shaped valley is really spectacular. The walk is approximately 5 miles and you should allow at least 3 hours. The walk starts at the second (top) Forestry Commission car park you come to as you approach from Talybont-on-Usk.

1 From the car park entrance, take the path on the right that leads steeply uphill, alongside a waterfall on the Nant Bwrefwr. The path is well laid with stones, but it is steep, and the climb is continuous for half a mile, so take your time and don't expend all your energy at the start!

2 After passing a second waterfall on your left and admiring the views to the south, you will reach the top of Craig y Fan Ddu; a spur off the main spine of the Beacons. The top is a relatively level plateau. The path bears to the right. Follow the ridge path, being mindful of the steep drop to your right.

3 After a little over half a mile, cross the stream at the top of Torpantau Waterfall. Follow the path along the Graig Fan Las ridge towards the head of the valley.





4

769 Waun Rydd

5

Memorial

Blaen y Glyn

Waterfall

6

Stile

CAR PARK

7

7b

Waterfall

Waterfall

Waterfall

USK



from this point. You are aiming for where trees can be seen growing either side of the Caerfanell towards the bottom of the valley. The route I took is marked with a brown line on the map. Beware; the ground is uneven and can be boggy.

6 Eventually a clear path becomes evident beside the stream. Join this and follow it, passing waterfalls, to a stile. Go over the stile, and continue past more waterfalls and fast flowing water. Somewhere around here might be a good spot for a picnic!

7 If you're flagging at this point, watch out for a kind of stile on the opposite bank, just before a waterfall, (it's a wooden piece of fence, for climbing over, rather than an actual stile). Cross the stream and go over the fence. Follow the well made path up through pine woodland, with the sound of more waterfalls coming from your left. The track eventually arrives back at the the car park.

7b Alternatively, (and if you don't want to ford the river and climb over the fence) Continue to a footbridge and cross the river here. At the point where the Bwrefwr stream joins the river, there is a rough track that leads up through the woods and past several beautiful waterfalls on it's way back up to the car park. It's harder going than the track at 7, but it's well worth it if your legs and footwear are up to it! This route is marked in yellow on the map.

4 When you reach the head of the valley, the path begins to break up and can be difficult to follow. You are aiming for the point just below the start of the craggy rocks on the eastern flank of the valley.

5 Here is the wreckage of a WWII Wellington Bomber which crashed here on 6th July, 1942. All five of the Canadian aircrew were killed in the crash, and there is a memorial to them on the site. One of the engines can be found lower down in a gully. There is no path to speak of

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March Weather Outlook

by Jonathan Powell

With a fair proportion of February delivering wet weather across the region, begging the question as to when it would actually stop raining, the final stages of the month did see that stranglehold loosen. March is unlikely to see that grip tighten again with perhaps a more balanced month ahead. Therefore, expect more of an even mix of rain and drier, brighter spells of weather, although whilst there doesn't look to be any sustained and lengthy periods of rainfall, what does arrive, could at times be on the heavy side. Temperatures will be quite varied but there appears to be an overall lean toward milder conditions, with only a minimal threat of frost activity, and even if we do have a frost, it looks neither sharp or severe. April may well shift affairs further toward being drier overall than wetter. The amount of rain during any episode, (albeit shorter in duration), will accumulate to reflect a wetter than average month, with temperatures on or above the average.



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Living is the Art

“Self-consciousness is the enemy of all art, be it acting, writing, painting, or living itself, which is the greatest art of all.”

~ Ray Bradbury



I can remember the first time it dawned on me that creativity had very little at all to do with 'me'. I was mucking around with my daughter at bedtime and all of a sudden found myself doing something silly, that we both found hilarious. In amongst the peals of laughter I think I remarked, “Well, that’s not something we’ve done before, is it?!” but it was only afterwards that I reflected on the deeper significance of this unassuming moment.

There were two aspects to it that really stood out for me. The first was that it was *truly* unique – something I’d not said or done, or could even recall seeing before, in my entire life. And the second was that it was nothing conscious that I’d did: it wasn’t a case of thinking about it and then choosing from a menu of uniquely-silly-things-to-amuse-my-daughter, it just occurred, spontaneously.

Which got me thinking, where on earth did that come from?! Where do *any* of our creations come from?

As somebody who writes for an audience every day, it’s a subject I find endlessly fascinating, and the accompanying exploration of topics

such as inspiration, agency and creative flow have all contributed to my understanding of life in general, and led me to conclude, somewhat heretically, that ‘I’ am not doing any of it – it’s just happening!

Of course it’s happening ‘on my watch’, if you like – it’s these hands that move on the keyboard; certain patterns of language seem unmistakably Giles-like, but I can tell you the one thing that’s going to *stop* the creative flow, and that’s over-thinking it.

As soon as I put my ‘self’ in the picture—wondering what people will think of me or my writing; racking my brains for content; believing that it’s all ‘on me’ to produce—I’ll notice I’m just staring at a flashing cursor, or reaching for my phone to procrastinate away the heavy feeling of self-consciousness.

There’s nothing *innovative* about that feeling of a self. It’s known, habitual, predictable. A bit boring really, which is no great surprise when we remember it’s constructed entirely from historical data: memory, conditioned belief, the past. To look there for something new, is a fool’s errand.

Conversely, when the notion of self is *absent*, is when the work actually

gets done. That’s when novelty *just flows*, great ideas *just occur* and the creative output *just happens*. There’s no sense of ‘me’, no sense of time, just presence, and a rediscovery of life’s infinitely creative power, expressing itself through this mind-body and all its quirks.

It’s such an irony that you’re continually encouraged to ‘be yourself’ and ‘express yourself’ when the fact of the matter is, that idea of ‘self’ is not required for creativity – it’s only ever going to get in the way!

I’d invite you to notice this for yourself, the next time you bring anything fresh into form, be it something traditionally associated with the creative arts, or even just a turn of phrase, a gesture, or a brand-new way of making your kids laugh.

In seeing that ‘you’ aren’t involved, you might find it removes some of the pressure from your endeavours, whatever they are, and allows you to show up in situations with less on your mind, and more of your true nature on offer.

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BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

This month, the crafty booksellers at Book-ish have handpicked a selection of inspiring reads to ignite your creativity. Dive in and discover your next project!

The Print Making Book

Vanessa Mooncie

£14.99

The Print Making Book:

Projects and Techniques in the Art of Hand-Printing is a complete introduction to hand printing, guiding you through 23 projects using relief, screen and mono-printing techniques with easily sourced materials. No printing press is needed, and projects can be done at home in your kitchen, bathroom, or garden. Vanessa Mooncie's original designs let you create printed greetings cards, crockery, cushions, silk scarves, jewellery, bags, wallpaper, and more. With clear step-by-step instructions, templates and illustrations, this book inspires handmade, personal creations for fashion and home, perfect for unique gifts full of charm.

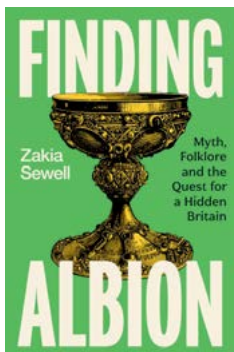
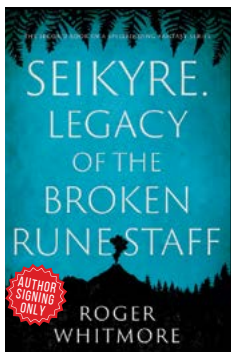
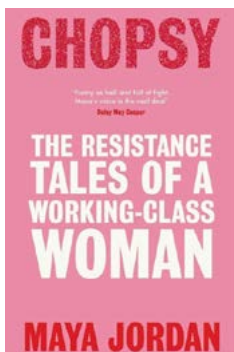
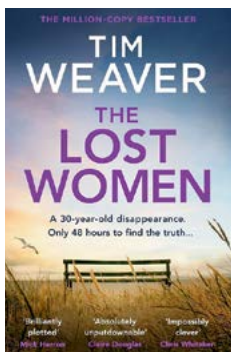
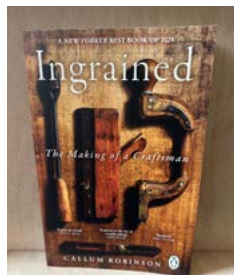


Ingrained – The Making of a Craftsman

Callum Robinson

£10.99

Ingrained is a love letter to trees, timber, and craftsmanship...and to finding your own voice. Callum Robinson, eldest son of a master woodworker, grew up surrounded by wood and trees, learning the craft in his father's workshop. As he pursued his own path, chasing bigger projects and business success, he lost touch with his roots. After a major setback threatened everything he had built, he was forced to reconsider what truly mattered. Blending memoir and nature writing, Ingrained is a heartfelt reflection on working with your hands, inheritance, community and the beauty of the natural world.



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24TH MARCH, 7:30PM | ZAKIA SEWELL
BOOK-ISH LOFT, CRICKHOWELL
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Making Matters: In Search of Creative Wonders

Clare Hunter

£20

As children, making - snowmen, paper boats, playful performances - sparked imagination and shaped who we became. As adults, finding space for creativity can be harder. In *Making Matters*, Clare Hunter explores craft traditions across centuries and cultures, encouraging us to engage with the world through our hands, discover beauty and embrace imagination. From paper crafts to lanterns, puppets and pinhole cameras, she celebrates creative delight. Blending history, culture, politics and storytelling, the book highlights remarkable objects and people, inspiring readers to reconnect with making and reminding us of the joy and power of creating something with our own hands.

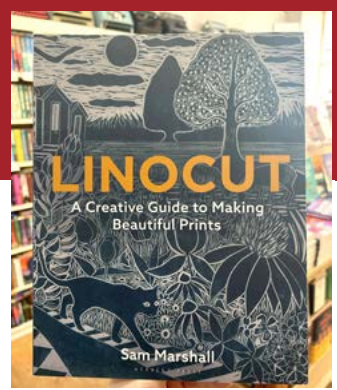


A Spring Treasury of Recipes, Crafts and Wisdom

Angela Ferraro-Fanning, Annelies Draws

£9.99

Families seeking nature-based fun away from screens will love this wholesome children's collection of cooking, crafting, and gardening projects, printed on 100% recycled paper. Young readers explore spring activities while learning seasonal tips and nature facts. From sowing seedlings and caring for baby chicks to brewing dandelion tea and crafting foraged windchimes, the book keeps kids busy on weekends or holidays. Angela Fanning encourages eco-friendly habits, supported by clear instructions and Annelies Draws' charming illustrations. Ivy Kids produces sustainably printed books that nurture creativity and children's connection to nature.

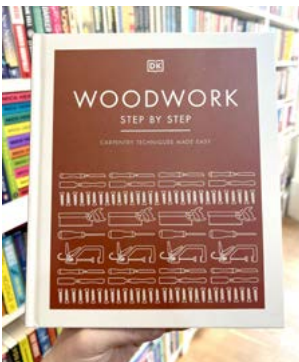


Linocut - A Creative Guide to Making Beautiful Prints

Sam Marshall

£20

A practical, step-by-step guide to creating contemporary linocut prints. Printmaker Sam Marshall explains the full process - from drawing and carving to inking and printing with 18 adaptable projects suitable for beginners or experienced artists working at a kitchen table or in a studio. Using low-cost materials and inspiration from everyday life, readers build confidence in observational drawing while learning techniques including simple and reduction linocuts, multi-block prints, monoprint, chine collé, jigsaw linocuts and rainbow rolls. Illustrated with Sam's work and guest artists, this essential guide offers creative inspiration, technical skills and expert advice on editing and refining your prints.



Woodwork Step by Step

DK

£14.99

Master key carpentry skills, from basic joinery to fine woodworking. This guide covers essential techniques, from simple woodworking and wood joints to finishing, woodturning and furniture restoration. With over 100 techniques and 20 beginner-friendly projects, it's a step-by-step resource for aspiring carpenters. Clear photography and instructions make learning easy, while expert tips show how to work with all major wood types and veneers. Discover how to maintain and use tools effectively, restore old furniture and master a variety of woodcraft techniques. Perfect for beginners, this visual guide empowers you to build, repair and create with confidence.

Brain-Boosting Benefits of Pilates

Pilates is often talked about in terms of core strength and better posture and this is very true! You'll stand taller and feel stronger. However, one of the most powerful benefits of Pilates isn't visible at all... your brain loves it.

The Pilates method, created by Joseph Pilates was originally called "Contrology" - the art of controlling the body with the mind. The mind-body connection goes far beyond philosophy or feel-good language; it reflects the way our nervous system organises movement, strength, and control. When you move with precision, coordinate breath with effort and focus deeply on alignment, you light up multiple areas of the brain at once. Balance, spatial awareness, memory, concentration and motor control all get to work alongside your muscles.

Research consistently shows that exercise increases blood flow to the brain, supporting the growth of new neural connections and protecting cognitive function as we age. But Pilates adds another layer: complexity. It asks you to think.



To adjust. To notice. To refine. That challenge - especially when you're learning new exercises or progressing to more demanding variations - pushes you gently out of your comfort zone. And that's where the magic happens.

When we do hard things, particularly things that require coordination and skill, we stimulate neuroplasticity - the brain's ability to adapt and rewire itself. Over time, this supports sharper thinking, better reaction times and improved resilience. In other words, a stronger brain for longer.

Longevity is a bit of a buzz word at the moment but it's not just about adding years to your life; it's about adding life to your years. Pilates strengthens the body, certainly. But it also cultivates focus, confidence and cognitive vitality. Each session becomes a small investment in your future self.

If you move with intention, rather than just exercise because you know you should, you'll reap the benefits in so many ways. Learn something new. Challenge your balance. Your muscles will thank you and your brain will quietly keep you younger for longer.

Kate Thomas



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Turnpike Trusts & Toll Gates

How Roads used to be Managed in Crickhowell



The Greenhill gate on the road to Abergavenny

Potholes, zebra crossings and road maintenance have been the subject of local discussion lately: so we're going to take a look at how roads were funded and maintained in the past.

It is only fairly recently that government has had responsibility for the roads of the nation. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, it was the private turnpike trusts that developed and maintained these vital routes of communication, with income from tolls along the road providing a return on the investment. Breconshire's Turnpike Trust advertised the tollgates to be let annually: in 1817, the three gates at Crickhowell could be had for £370 (over £300,000 today), Watton gate in Brecon was let for £300.

The successful bidders would be responsible for managing the gates and hiring the toll-gate keepers, in the expectation that tolls collected would yield a profit. Investors in the turnpikes were local landowners, savers and charities. Huge sums were lent and exchanged—the total for the Breconshire tollgates let in 1817 was £3757 or over £4 million today—and the quality of the road network improved. As a result, to be close to a turnpike road was an asset advertised in grand house sales, or the sale of timber from local woods.

In many places, tollgates are still visible. The Crickhowell bridge

gatehouse forms part of the Bridge End Inn. Other gates were sited at the bottom of Pregel Lane, near the current football ground opposite the Elvicta industrial estate, and on the south side of the river, by the turning to Heron's Rest marina. A board on the outside of the Red Indigo restaurant (formerly the White Hart Inn) on the western edge of Crickhowell shows tolls payable.

Tolls due to his GRACE the DUKE of Beaufort at Crickhowell.		L	S	D
Vix)	For every Score of Cattle.	0	0	30
	For every score of pigs	0	0	5
	For every score of sheep	0	0	5
	For every Horse drawing except Horses drawing Coal or Lime.	0	0	1½
	For every horse except with grain	0	0	1
	For every horse. laden with grain	0	0	0
	For every cart drawn by One or Two horses	0	0	3
The above toll was established in the Year of our LORD 1587.				
R.H.A. Davies, STEWARD.				
PONTCWMBETH GATE				

The investors may have made money: the gatekeepers did the work and for small wages. Always on call, they were provided with a home, in itself an attraction. It was common to find widowed women working as keepers, such as Sarah Edwards who kept the Greenhill gate in 1861.

In other parts of Wales, the onerous tolls and isolated nature of the tollgates made them targets for the Rebecca rioters. Breconshire was comparatively peaceful but individual cases of violence did happen: Ann Watkins, also at the Greenhill gate, summoned Robert Burns for unlawful assault in 1866. Nathaniel Brown at the Brecon road gate took William and James Jones to court for a similar offence in 1875.

While tempers could run high at the gate, tollkeepers and road users alike would go to court to settle disputes. Overcharging or charging those who felt they should be exempt were typical reasons for court cases: a Crickhowell Wesleyan minister took a local tollgate keeper to court in 1874 for illegally taking toll when he was on his way to chapel to take services.

Nationally the days of the turnpike trusts and toll gates were numbered after 1850. The railways provided too much competition, and most trusts were hugely in debt in the latter half of the 19th century. Locally however the toll gates functioned into the 1880s and we are lucky to have a photograph of the Greenhill gate on the road to Abergavenny from that period, (ABOVE).

Eilane Wigzell

NEXT MONTH'S FOCUS

HOMES AND A SEASONAL RESET.

With spring in the air and Easter just around the corner, next month's Focus will be all about *Homes and a Seasonal Reset*.

We'll be exploring de-cluttering, spring cleaning, home maintenance, interiors, garden spaces, and essential jobs to get done, alongside lifestyle inspiration and sustainability tips.

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