



ACTIVITY GROUPS

A Little bit of Welsh

Convenors: Ann Holloway 07443 224894,
Linda Calvin Thomas 07784 634567,
Alternate Fri. 10.00-11.00, Caldicot Library

Art

Convenor: Rob Harry2 01291 421282
Wed 1.30-4pm Portskewett Rec Hall

Bridge

Face to Face every Thursdays 2-4pm
Caldicot Library

Coffee Morning

1st Saturday every month 10-12
Caldicot Methodist Church

Computing

Convenor: John Mills 01291 420045
Fri 9.30-12.30 Bethany Baptist Church

Gardening

Convenor: Pauline Marx 07544 671870
2nd Thursday each month 2-4pm
Caldicot Methodist Church

Handicraft

Convenor: Jill Greenhaigh
01633 548968 1st & 3rd Wed 10-12pm
Caldicot Methodist Hall.

History

Convenor: Dave Edwards 01291 422303
3rd Wed in month, 2 - 4pm.
Caldicot Methodist Hall

Music Appreciation

Convenor: Jan Potter 01291 794034,
4th Wed of month 2-4pm.
Home of Jan Potter

Social Line Dancing

Convenor: Lynne Howells 01291 423395
Thur 7.30 - 9.00pm St Marys Church Hall

Science & Natural History

1st Monday in the Month.
10-12 Caldicot Methodist Hall

Scrabble

Convenor: Lyn Mitchell 01291 421567.
2nd & 4th Fri each month 2-4pm
Bethany Baptist Church Hall

Short Mat Bowls

Convenor: Helen Wormald 01291 423765
Wed 2 - 4 Scout Hall.

Spanish

Convenor: Julian Wood 01291 421095.
Mon 10.45-12. Various venues.

Table Tennis

Convenor: Les Mitchell 07367 064322
Mon 2-4 Scout Hall. Sandy Lane

Ukulele

Convenor: Chris Spiller 01291 424694
Tue 2-4, Portskewett Recreation Hall

Walking Groups

Every Tuesday am
Various Locations & Starting Points

Stragglers, 3-4 mls

Convenor: Wendy Powell 01291 421946

Amblers, 4-5 mls

Convenors Jenny & Stan Griffiths
01633 880578

Strollers, 4.5-6 mls

Convenor: Bill Bewg 01633 880165.

Striders 5-7 mls

Convenor: Richard Harding 01291 420305

Facebook

jct7788@aol.com

CHAIR REPORT

This will be the last Chair Report I will write as before the next Newsletter publication I will have stepped down and someone else will be your Chair.

We have had a very successful year with membership growing steadily and currently standing at 352. Our Science and Natural History group and History group were saved by the intervention of Lynsey Smith, Glenys Turner, Frances Francis, Sue Steel, Marie Ashley, Margaret Cook, Jenny King, who stepped forward to run the Science group and Cindy McOwen, Lyn Howells, Joy Ganesh and Irene Lewis who stepped forward to help Dave Edwards and Marion Guppy with the History group. There are full schedules of speakers in place for these groups and Science and Natural History have organised several successful day trips. Numbers in attendance at both groups have increased and are now at a very healthy level.

When discovering that our A Little Bit of Welsh class was full, Marie Ashley stepped forward and started a new beginners Welsh group, Blas Cymraeg, which meets twice each month and is proving very successful.

We have successfully implemented the Beacon System a bespoke Data System for u3a's, currently used by over 700 u3a's in the U.K. Thank you to John Calvin-Thomas and Maurice Turner who were responsible for the implementation and continue to administer the system. The use of this system for our Membership records and Finances have made the roles of Treasurer and Membership Secretary much easier. John Calvin-Thomas has also implemented the use of a Card Reader so that you will be able to pay your subs in April using this option if you so wish.

I am sure you will have noticed our new and improved Website, this has been built by Ingrid Arntzen and Ann Taylor-Heard. I know that this was no easy task and they have both worked extremely hard in getting this up and running. Please utilise this as much as possible as we do have many enquiries through the website. You can advertise any upcoming events/special occasions for your groups on the website and post pictures hopefully encouraging new members to join us. We have also been using our Facebook page again through which we have gained new members. If you wish to advertise on this please contact John Calvin-Thomas.

In April we will be holding our A.G.M. when we will be voting for many new committee members. We have had members come forward to join the committee and if they are all accepted at the A.G.M. we will have a very strong committee of 14 to take us into 2025/2026.

Finally I want to thank all of the Committee members who have supported me over the last few years and all of the Convenors who have worked so hard on your behalf. I also wish to thank every member without you there would be no u3a. I look forward to an exciting 2025/2026.

Linda Stewart

UKULELE GROUP

A slightly different event for the ukulele group on Friday 17 January where they played at the Magor and Undy community hub. It was “Old Twelfth Night” and the event was a Traditional Orchard Wassail with a torchlight walk around the orchard to bless the trees led by the Apple Queen. Cider was poured over the apple tree roots to bless them for a good crop in the forthcoming season. After each tree was blessed the crowd chanted “Capfuls, hatfuls, 3 bushell bags full, Wassail” and produced a lot of noise banging together pots and pans to scare off any malignant spirits. Many local people and families attended and after the walk they returned to the hub for cider and to hear music from a fiddler and then several tunes from the ukulele group (see photo)

Chris Spiller



open stage at the Mathern Village Fete (picture omitted from last Newsletter)

THE PICTURE

I'd never been to one before, a house clearance. There was old-fashioned furniture, boxes of cutlery and an enormous etched mirror. A group of people were quarrelling over a hall stand, and a woman was holding plates up to the light, I knew not why. I saw a grimy old picture and tried reading the signature. It had a V I, then some marks I couldn't decipher, and an NT. Could be Vincent, I thought. *Vincent*. I started to shake. I had stumbled onto a Van Gogh. I stood with my back to it trying to hide it while I pretended to read my catalogue. It took ages to get to lot 37, the picture, and to my surprise no one was interested in it. 'I'll give you a fiver for the frame,' I said, my quivering voice a near octave higher than normal. Clack, the gavel sealed my bid. I rushed home to show my wife. 'Look,' I said with a flourish. 'Hmm, a bit dirty isn't it?'

Holding it out at arm's length in front of me I studied it with pride. 'Dirt or no dirt, it'll make us rich.'

'Oh,' she said, looking at the back, 'is a painting of St Vincent Harbour 1923 worth a fortune then?'

Rob Taylor-Heard

COMPUTER GROUP

Since our last letter in October, what have we done? Well some of us were taught and made our own Christmas cards, and some of our group did that. We continue to hold our monthly photo competition subject PEOPLE (what a motly crowd was on display). In November our subject was ANIMALS. We also supported our u3a Christmas fayre on the Saturday. We have now added our group to our Face Book/Website so all our members and non-members can scan Caldicot u3a for more information. Also our programme is now updated till April 2025. Ann T-H spoke to us about the importance of PASS-WORDS, Ingrid organised us into small groups to learn more. We continue to search the WEB each week, as the world gets smaller and more people like to learn more about other people and countries. ONE CLICK and where will it lead us NEXT. Do come and join us especially if you have a problem, every Friday 10.00 - 12.30pm.

PS Don't forget your used print cartridges. You can bring them to our monthly coffee mornings on the 1st Saturday of the month. IT ALL HELPS CANCER RESEARCH.

Happy New Year.

A.G.M

3rd April, 10.00a.m.

**Caldicot Methodist
Church**

PHONE SCAM

Before Christmas my daughter nearly fell foul of a phone scam. She decided to contact ACTION FRAUD and was given the following websites to contact for further information.

These are:-

who-called.co.uk
getsafeonline.org
which.co.uk

Helen Wormald

ART GROUP

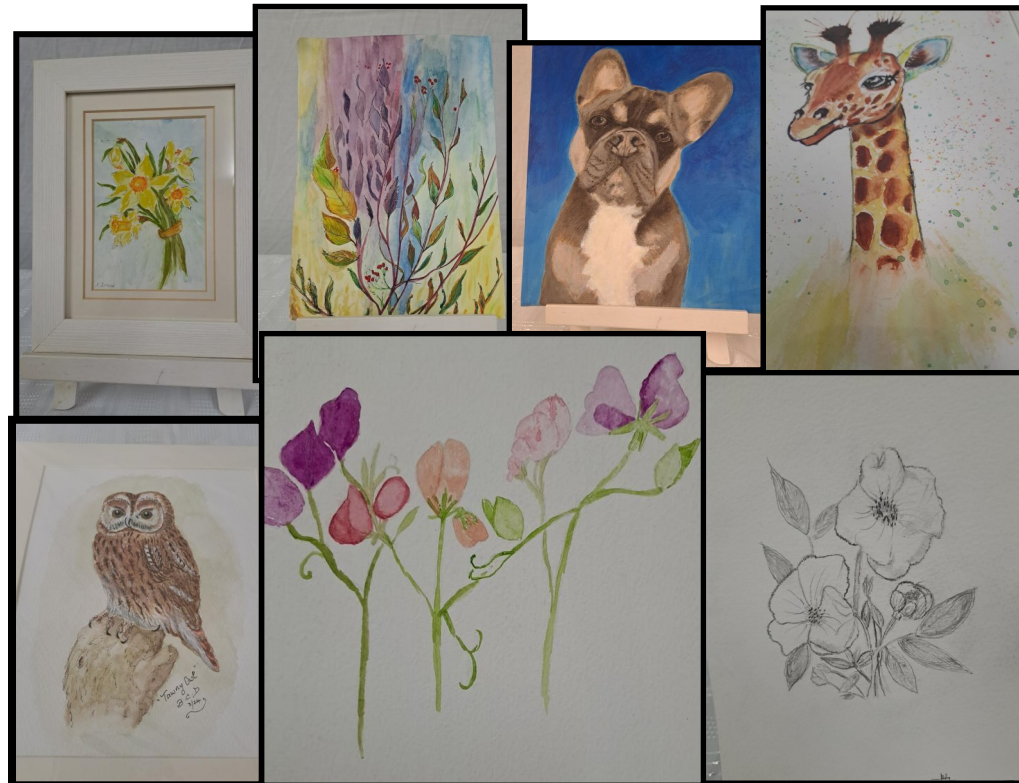
2024 has been a really good year for our Art Group . Our numbers have grown and as a result we managed to grow our finances. In doing so we have been able to afford to fund some innovative ideas that we believe have enriched our group both in terms of our group aims of inclusivity and learning . In the Summer where we had lighter days, we upped our sessions from 2 to 2.5 hours. We were also able to book 2 professional artists, one who gave us a demonstration on Watercolour techniques and then later another on the importance of perspective and light and shade .

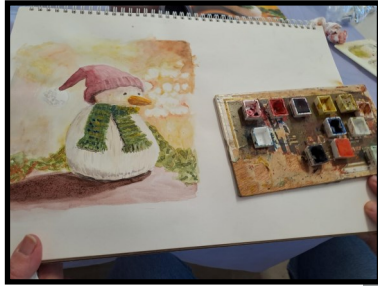
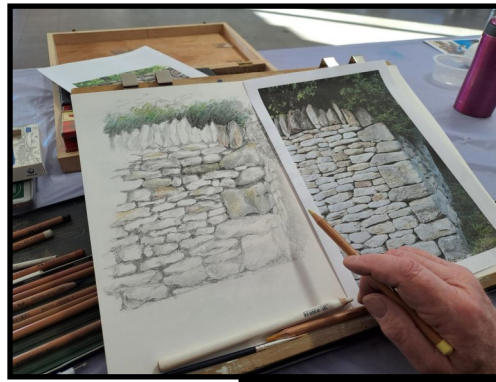
Another of our aims was to encourage our group members to exhibit their work in order that they could gain confidence in not only showing, but also talking about what they had achieved and how much they enjoyed their Art. To that end we have exhibited at Caldicot Library, our local Methodist and Caerwent Churches . Also it was good fun to interact with members and the general public for our u3a Open Day and for several Church Fairs and Bazaars. A positive outcome of those initiatives is the fact that people now know who we are and more importantly what our group the u3a are about.

We ended our year with the Art group tradition of Fish n Chips for Christmas and enthusiasm about the future So 2025 holds lots of opportunities for us to continue to plan and develop our skills and our group together.

So best wishes from all of the Art Group.

Rob Harry.





HISTORY GROUP

At the November meeting I, as one of the members of the group, gave an illustrated talk entitled "My Father's Secret Past". As I am interested in Family History I had collected all the known facts about my father, Rev. Vincent Evans, and his only brother from when they were born in Upper Dock View Road, Barry, through their childhood in Cardiff and their teenage years in Carmarthen. In Carmarthen they both sang in a church choir which may have had some bearing on my father deciding to go to St David's College, Lampeter to train for the church. On leaving college his first Curacy was at Laugharne in Carmarthenshire but he soon came to Monmouthshire and was a Curate at Christ Church, Ebbw Vale and St John's Church, Wainfelin before becoming the Vicar of Crumlin. This was followed by being Vicar of Llanddewi Rhydderch which was just before he married my mother. The Vicarage at Llanddewi Rhydderch was the first home in 1940 for me and in 1942 for my sister. My father later became Vicar of Beaufort, Rector of Henllys with Bettws and Vicar of Llantilio Crossenny and Rector of Llanvihangel-Ystern-Llewern when he was made Rural Dean of Raglan. Unfortunately he had to retire in 1958 due to ill health but lived a further 34 years in retirement! When my mother died in 1999 in her 100th year and was laid to rest with my father in St Mary's churchyard, Ross-on-Wye I thought I had found out everything about my father's life.

However this was not the case as in 2001 a former neighbour of my parents sent me a copy of the Sunday Express of the 19th August 2001. The centre pages having a bold headline "Dad's Army vicars who spearheaded secret war". The article went on to describe how "a select band of Welsh clergymen and other civilians were designated Special Duties agents". In WW2 UK Civilian Units were - Home Guard (Dad's Army) then the highly secret Auxiliary Units which were split up into Special Patrols and Special Duties.

Sixty years on the sole surviving member (George Vater - a farm worker) of the group had broken his silence for the first time to talk about his wartime double life. He described to the reporter how "the late Rev Sluman, Vicar of Llantilio Crossenny was head of a secret cabal of seven Special Duties Agents in South Wales that included two other vicars, Vincent Evans (my father) of Llanddewi Rhydderch and Cecil Gower Rees of Llanarth. Their two band radio was hidden under Sluman's altar and a 40ft aerial was concealed behind the lightning conductor of the steeple". This article was repeated in the Sunday Times on the 10th November 2002 and since then I have been able to find a lot of online articles on the same subject.

David Evans

History: 19th February, 2.00p.m. Caldicot Methodist Church - Speaker Graham Duke - The Code Breakers of Bletchley

19th March, 2.00p.m. Caldicot Methodist Church - Speaker Roger James - Morgan the Pirate

NO BAKE CHOCOLATE CHEESECAKE

Ingredients

- 200g/7oz chocolate digestive biscuits, crushed to fine crumbs: 200g/7oz chocolate digestive biscuits, crushed to fine crumbs
- 75g/3oz **butter**, melted and cooled slightly: 75g/3oz butter, melted and cooled slightly
- 800g/1lb 12oz **cream cheese**: 800g/1lb 12oz cream cheese
- **icing sugar**, to taste: icing sugar, to taste
- 400g/14oz milk chocolate (35% cocoa solids), or you can use a mixture of 300g/10½oz milk chocolate and 100g/3½oz **dark chocolate** (70% cocoa solids): 400g/14oz milk chocolate (35% cocoa solids), or you can use a mixture of 300g/10½oz milk chocolate and 100g/3½oz dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids)
- 1 tsp **vegetable oil**: 1 tsp vegetable oil
- 50g/1¾oz **white chocolate**: 50g/1¾oz white chocolate

Method

1. Mix the crushed biscuits and butter together in a bowl with the back of a wooden spoon until well combined.
2. Spoon the mixture into a 23cm/9in springform tin and press down very hard all the way around the base until flat and even.
3. Mix the cream cheese and icing sugar together in a bowl.
4. Meanwhile melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water, making sure the bottom of the bowl does not touch the water.
5. Pour a quarter of the chocolate into a jug, stir in the oil, then set aside and keep warm. (The chocolate can also be reheated in the microwave for 20 seconds if it cools down.)
6. Place a large dollop of the cream cheese mixture into the bowl of remaining chocolate and stir until well combined. Keep adding the mixture, one dollop at a time, and mixing it vigorously until the chocolate mixture becomes smooth and silky and you have added all of the cream cheese.
7. Pour the mixture onto the biscuit base and use the back of a large spoon to smooth the top, pressing down so that no gaps remain. Chill the cheesecake in the fridge for 20 minutes, or until the chocolate top begins to firm. The cheesecake can also be placed into the freezer for 10 minutes to set.
8. Melt the white chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water and make sure the jug of milk chocolate is nice and runny.
9. Remove the cheesecake from the fridge and pour the milk chocolate on top, spreading it out as you go until the top is completely covered. (For a smooth finish, pick up the cheesecake and tilt it back and forth, letting the chocolate run over and cover the cream cheese filling.)
10. Drizzle white chocolate lines across the top about 2cm/¾in apart. The neatest way to do this is by putting the chocolate into a piping bag fitted with a very small nozzle.
11. Place the cheesecake so the lines are running towards you, then take a cocktail stick and drag it from left to right, making lines from left to right 2cm/¾in apart to form a grid. Drag the cocktail stick once again from right to left between the toothpick lines that you have just made. You will need to do this quite quickly so the chocolate lines are still runny. Leave the cheesecake in a cool place to set for about two hours.
12. Run a sharp knife around the inside of the tin and carefully remove the cake. Serve in wedges with a drizzle of single cream.

GARDENING GROUP - December Meeting





FLOWER SHOW & PLANT FAIR

SATURDAY 15TH FEBRUARY
11:00 – 15:30

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 01386 554790

www.alpinegardensociety.net

GARDENING continued

Gardening Meeting on Thursday
13th February at 2.00 p.m.
at Caldicot Methodist Church.
The Speaker will be Margie Hoffnung
and her talk is "Garden Visiting -
A Very British Tradition".

Gardening Meeting on Thursday
13th March at 2.00 p.m. at Caldicot
Methodist Church.

**THIS WILL BE OUR FINAL
MEETING,
UNLESS OTHER MEMBERS HELP.
PLEASE DO NOT LET THIS
HAPPEN.**

Neeta Baicher is willing to help if
others come forward. Maurice
Turner has offered to be our Group
Treasurer on a temporary basis.

Please let me know if you can help.

Pauline Marx

Gardening Group Convenor

Gardening: 13th February, 2.00p.m.
Caldicot Methodist Church - Speaker
Margie Hoffnung - "Garden Visiting A
very British Tradition"

After the storms of Winter, the bulbs
are pushing through the soil.
Lovely to see the first Snowdrops
emerging and catkins on the
hedges.
Our Mimosa is flowering for the first
time. It was planted 2 years ago.

SCIENCE AND NATURAL HISTORY GROUP SPEAKERS 2025

3rd February – John Burrows



Chepstow Bridge 1816 - a Bridge of
Significance - World Heritage

3rd March – Mike Skelton



Newport Wetlands

**7th April - Sam Mitchell -
Hydrology**



Flood Defences and Warnings

***MAY BANK HOLIDAY – No
Speaker***

**2ND June – Emma Newrick –
Newport Transporter Bridge**



BEST OF TIMES

If you were born between 1930 and 1946, you belong to an incredibly rare group: only 1% of your generation is still alive today. At ages ranging from 77 to 93, your era is a unique time capsule in human history.

Here's why:

You were born into hardship. Your generation climbed out of the Great Depression and bore witness to a world at war. You lived through ration books, saved tin foil, and reused everything—nothing was wasted.

You remember the milkman. Fresh milk was delivered to your door. Life was simpler and centered around the basics. Discipline came from both parents and teachers, with no room for excuses.

Your imagination was your playground. Without TVs, you played outside and created entire worlds in your mind from what you heard on the radio. The family gathered around the radio for news or entertainment.

Technology was in its infancy. Phones were communal, calculators were hand-cranked, and newspapers were the primary source of information. Typewriters, not computers, recorded thoughts.

Your childhood was secure. Post-WWII brought a bright future—no terrorism, no internet, no global warming debates. It was a golden era of optimism, innovation, and growth.

You are the last generation to live through a time when:

Black-and-white TVs were cutting-edge.

Highways weren't motorways.

Shopping meant visiting downtown stores.

Polio was a feared disease.

While your parents worked hard to rebuild their lives, you grew up in a world of endless possibilities. You thrived in a time of peace, progress, and security that the world may never see again.

If you're over 77 years old, take pride in having lived through these extraordinary times. You are one of the lucky 1% who can say, "I lived through the best of times."

SHORT MAT BOWLS

On the 8th March we will be attempting to retain the Trophy we won in March 2024 at the Monmouthshire Short Mat Bowls (MSMBA) Triples competition. The winning team from that match will be playing again. We hope to enter a further two teams.

We have applied to rejoin the MSMBA League and have been accepted. The League Season starts in the Autumn from September to April, so we are busy practising our techniques.

We are still looking for new players who would like to play in competitions. We have recently welcomed two new players to the group, one a new member to the u3a.

HISTORY GROUP

Crossing the Severn, Peter Strong

Our talk this month- January was Peter Strong talking about Crossing the Severn. People have been crossing the Severn Estuary for thousands of years. Until the development of good roads, railways and canals it was often the quickest way of transporting people, animals and goods over long distances.

Legends in the ancient Welsh book, the Mabinogion, tell of a Cornish relative of King Arthur who tried to kill a wild boar which escaped across the Bristol Channel to Wales. Apparently, the story reflects the booming trade across the Severn estuary when Gwent was famous for exporting wheat and honey, with a major iron-age trading port in the Sudbrook area. Archaeologists highlight the similarity of the remains of forts and stone circles from this period on both sides of the estuary. Immigrant Celts had crossed the river and installed their culture on the South Wales levels, trading and associating with their neighbours on the English side more than with the inland Welsh, as river travel was much easier than overland travel.

The development of the roman towns of Gloucester, Caerwent, Caerleon and Bath dramatically increased river traffic, and just like today there were 2 main crossings of the Severn estuary; Aust to Beachley (old passage) and New Passage to Portskewett. So the two main crossings points is roughly where the two Severn road bridges stand today. Both of these ferry crossings were dangerous(most of us will know of the huge tidal range the river has)

The river then was narrower and now most of the evidence from roman times has been washed away by coastal erosion and the turbulent Severn tides, but in 1994 the wreck of a roman boat was found at Magor. It is typical of the boats that would have sailed across the Severn with a crew of 2 transporting up to 90 sacks of grain or other goods. There are also the remains of a boat found at Caldicot Castle.

With the coming of Christianity there was much monastic traffic across the river. Tradition has it that in 603 AD St. Augustine and leaders of the Anglo Saxon church met with welsh bishops at Aust to discuss some differences of opinion on how the church should be run. The welsh bishops had decided that if on landing at Aust St. Augustine rose politely to greet them they would bow to his wishes. He didn't, so they didn't. In the 12th century free passage across the river was granted to monks (relations had obviously improved but the question is who was paying and why). Cross river trade in iron, leather, fish, and seaweed for making soap was handled at the Welsh Back quay in Bristol, and timber, lead and coal was transported back across the river.

Severnside, a term coined by John Leyland in the 16th century, was a cultural province covering both sides of the river. In his time many of the Bristol apprentices came from South Wales. Some of the crew on John Cabots boat may well have been Welsh. Smugglers and robbers from South Wales became such a problem that Henry VIII banned all night-time crossings, and passed Acts of Union between England and Wales to tighten his control over the Welsh side. Pirates from Ireland were a problem. There is a tale that Irish

pirates often took local people from Caerwent as slaves and there is a tale that one young lad became St Patrick. !
Although the old passage had been in use from ancient times, the New Passage Ferry Co., had gone out of business by 1718, when Thomas Lewis opened his New Passage ferry. The Duke of Beaufort, who had interests in the old passage, sued Thomas, who won his case by saying that he was merely maintaining a pre-existing service. Some famous people used the ferry services. Daniel Defoe described it as 'ugly, dangerous and inconvenient'. Charles Wesley was swept downriver in 1742 when the wind failed, and in 1748 having waited 5 hours for the new passage ferry, walked to the old passage to find the ferry had just left. Courageous admiral Lord Nelson took one look and turned back, declaring that he didn't wish to be drowned in a ditch. Reverend Gilpin, originator of the 'picturesque' and Wye valley tourism was similarly unimpressed. Victorian tourists had to share the ferry with cows, horses, pigs, sheep, poultry, and even farmers, swearing in both English and Welsh. Although steam boats were introduced in the 1820's to take the lucrative mail contract, passengers described them as 'lumbering, cumbrous beasts, waddling on the waves', preferring the sailing boats. The railways eventually put the ferries out of business, but the motorcar brought them back again. The Aust car ferry crossed the river from 1931 until in 1966 the 'old' Severn bridge opened (cost 20p), Bob Dylan being one of the last ferry passengers. Ten years later the Prince of Wales bridge followed. The rest is history so they say but what of the future. The story goes on.

Joy Ganesh



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