

LLANGOLLEN AND DISTRICT YOUNG FARMERS' CLUB

Llangollen and District YFC came into being in 1940. The Club membership was made up of local young people, almost wholly farm children, and was started with much help from Mr Ieuan Wynne and Mr Noel Bowen. Noel Bowen came to Llangollen to join a veterinary practice with his young wife Edna, who was a teacher.

The original aim of this and many Young Farmers' Clubs was to improve animal husbandry and teach new and better farming techniques. Some Clubs began as calf-rearing Clubs during the Second World War when fresh food was scarce.

Noel Bowen chaperoned the first group of farmers and land girls, when they met on a weekly basis at the Old Armoury.

Annually, competitions took place as the seasons changed which tested member's skills against those of other local clubs. Things like ploughing, tractor driving, shearing ewes with hand-clippers – imagine that these days! The best sheaf of corn was judged, the best turned-out working horse, crafts, cookery and dressmaking, were all learned, practised and judged. Acting and drama was something which Llangollen members enjoyed, as they were put through their paces by Mrs Bowen, an English teacher, and made their debuts on stage.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, the late Mr Peter Walker MBE, and his sister Mrs Sheila Lewis were amongst the member who learned their crafts through YFC benefited from the new possibilities of overseas travel, visiting foreign countries on YFC exchange visits. The skills of public speaking must have been well taught and well learned by Peter, who went on to make a great contribution to the Town and Country Councils of the area.

As the 1960s and 1970s rolled along, leisure activities began to play a small part in the movement. This gave members the chance to experience new activities, new methods of farming, travel and sports. Transport being more readily available, the ability to mix with other clubs and areas was made possible. Our club took advantage of this organising group exchanges the most notable to Denmark.

Rodeos were another event in which Llangollen was active. Usually held on Bank Holiday Mondays in August, Llandyn Fields became the venue for bareback cattle and horse riding. They came from far and wide for this western-style bonanza which took months of preparation and raised lots of money for charities both local and national. The Llangollen Hospital radio system between doctors and the hospital was set up using rodeo profits. In the early 70s, animal welfare issues became the concern of more people and the rodeos were stopped by the club in 1972.

Looking for another way to channel their energy the club then became involved in the Town in which YFC could have a home, and where we still meet on a Tuesday.

The club has never been a large unit in numbers. On average membership has been 15-20 young people. During the 70s and early 80s there was a much smaller unit, fighting hard to survive, but it did just that. Numbers grew then to around 30 and amongst that group again acting and stockjudging came to the fore. Pantomimes came to be our forte, culminating in us writing and performing at Wales level. Wales YFC Rural Life Projects came into being and the club's community profile was increased when they did a considerable amount of cleaning and gardening work in Pen-y-Bryn Cemetery and installed over 100 smoke alarms in the homes of the elderly of the area.

By 2002, the club had an unprecedented 48 members and is one of the largest units in Clwyd. As the 50th and more recently 60th anniversaries of the club have been celebrated, it is heartening to see so many past members returning.

Our Club has definitely left its mark on the county, Wales and National YFC. We have had County Queens in Sheila Lewis, Gwyneth Davies, Margaret Davies and Sharon Jones, a Dairy Princess in Bronwen Roberts, a Wales Chairman in Derek Hughes, County Chairpersons in Peter Walker, Derek Hughes, Sharon Jones and Philip Davies, Young Farmers of the Year in Clwyd Jones and Phil Davies, a Wales Treasurer in Clwyd Jones and County Co-ordinators in Gwyneth Davies and Sharon Jones.

We draw new members from farming and non-farming backgrounds in almost equal numbers and still seek to empower and educate all rurally-based young people through a mixture of fun, learning and hard work.

Here's to the next 60 years!