

## TREASURE ISLAND

### HOW CHILDHOOD ON A REMOTE WELSH ISLAND PREPARED GWENDA WATSON FOR A FUTURE LIFE OF MISSION

Gwenda Watson went from living on a remote monastic island off the North Wales coast – to helping husband Victor run one of Britain's biggest Methodist churches.

Born in 1930 at the village of Cwm-y-Glo, Gwenda contracted polio at just three months. If that wasn't enough of a challenge, her mother became headmistress of the only school on Ynys Enlli, better known as Bardsey.

They moved to this 'Island of 20,000 Saints' two miles off the Llŷn Peninsula. It sounds magical, but the island lacked running water, gas and electricity.

'There were ten houses, a chapel, a school and a lighthouse,' Gwenda smiled. She remembers it as a special childhood, but wonders how her mother coped, especially when her father died of tuberculosis.

Lighting was by paraffin lamps. Water came from wells. Driftwood was gathered for the fire. 'But we all had enough,' Gwenda remembered. She now realises that challenging existence prepared her for mission and church work.

Gwenda continued her education at Llandudno, and went on to study social science at Leeds University. There she met Vic, who was training to be a



CLUBLAND CLERIC: Vic Watson

Methodist minister at nearby Wesley College, Headingley.

They married in 1956. Later that year, Vic was appointed as a missionary to Panama. 'We had three bags – my clothes, his clothes and the third contained Vic's books,' said Gwenda. 'It was exciting and new.'

Arriving at Colón, they found a huge wooden wreck of a manse: 'The stewards told us the only reason the house was still standing was because the termites

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CELTIC HOME: Gwenda Watson with a painting of the Bardsey school she attended

Photo: Clive Price

were holding hands'. There were two chairs in the living room and filthy beds upstairs. But locals rallied to furnish their new home.

The couple worked hard, building up the local Methodist churches which grew in membership. They set up a home for old people and a school. Vic attained the equivalent of a knighthood.

Gwenda caught an infection in her foot, which meant she had to receive medical

## CURTAIN CALL ON QUESTIONNAIRE

Our first ever residents' survey of its kind – which turned the spotlight on wellbeing and the web – has ended.

An impressive total of 880 forms were returned to us. Most of those questionnaires arrived by post. Some respondents used the online portal –

which has now been taken down from the MMHS website.

Most forms were filled in during the period from July to September 2018. It's now too late to send in any more questionnaires, as the analysis has been carried out and submitted for discussion.

'Thank you to all residents who took part,' said CEO Mairi Johnstone. 'The return rate was 76 per cent, which is exceptional. We were still receiving forms in May 2019!

'We've completed our analysis, and we hope to respond with further initiatives for 2019/20 and beyond. We appreciate your co-operation.'



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attention back home. Vic insisted on accompanying her, and the whole family returned to England in 1965.

Following various ministry appointments, Vic's next major mission was to Walworth Methodist Church, London. It was known as Clubland because of its pioneering youth work.

Clubland had become associated with showbiz figures like Michael Caine, a former member, and Bob Hope, a generous benefactor. But those glory days had ended by the time the Watsons arrived in 1977, and the church had been closed for four years.

Gwenda and Vic worked hard to reconnect with the multicultural community, who started to form a congregation. Walworth became one of the UK's fastest growing Methodist churches. 'Vic was just blessed with a gift,' said Gwenda.

He worked among detainees awaiting deportation, and campaigned for better asylum and immigration laws. Vic assisted in setting up the Methodist Leadership Racism Awareness Workshop and helped lead other initiatives.

It was a proud moment when Vic received the MBE in 1993. The following year, the Watsons retired to an MMHS property in the north of England.

Vic died in 2005, leaving Gwenda and their three grown-up children – Andrew, Megan and Phillip. 'I was just privileged to have been with Vic,' said Gwenda.

'So many extraordinary things happened throughout his ministry,' she added. 'But it was the people who mattered – the local people, the ordinary people.'

Gwenda made a return visit to Bardsey, long after the island community had left. As she scattered her mother's ashes, she felt the island's same mysterious presence that she had known as a child. ●



LITTLE ISLANDERS: Gwenda and childhood friends at Bardsey, which is now run by the Bardsey Island Trust

## A MESSAGE FROM MAIRI



My home church recently had what we called a 'weekend at home'. We came together for a couple of days to explore and celebrate what it means to be in relationship with God, each other and people outside the church.

From days' old babies to a 99-year-old (she doesn't half feel the pressure of making it to 100 in October!), I think we took some significant steps forward with our church's vision and mission. Dare I say it, we were

emboldened in our faith and that should impact on what we get up to, whether in our homes, places of work or communities.

Why am I telling you this? Well, you are a very important part of my community. You are the source of my daily work! Relationships matter hugely.

The Aaronic Blessing from the book of Numbers was sung at my wedding. Because of that, it has special significance to me. It's my prayer now for all of MMHS's ministerial residents:

*May the Lord bless you and keep you.  
May the Lord make his face to shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you.  
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,  
and give you peace.*

If you would like to hear it sung – beautifully I will add – use this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCpxgEHqjFA>

● Mairi Johnstone CEO

## WOODLANDS BOOST YOUR WELLBEING

**FORESTS HELP OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING. BUT WHAT HAPPENS IF THAT HELP RUNS OUT?**

Forestry England has launched a campaign to encourage more people to make regular visits to woodland to improve mental wellbeing. As part of recent *Mental Health Awareness Week*, they made a film with TV presenter Kate Humble, who claims to find comfort in woodland walks.

At the same time – and quite separately – slide guitarist and gospel blues artist Bryn Haworth launched a new single for the protection of woodlands and forests. *Enough Is Enough* warns that woodlands are being lost forever as demand for land, crops and money wins the battle over the world's forests.

'Walking for me is a form of meditation,' said Kate Humble, 'and the simple act of putting one foot in front of another has extraordinary benefits to my mental wellbeing. It helps me feel relaxed, less anxious and more creative.'

Forestry England said the nation's forests are more than rural landscapes.

Research shows that spending time in forests can improve our health and wellbeing.

The organisation quotes one woman in her 60s who's been woodland walking for three years. Her health has improved and the pain from her arthritis is much diminished. 'The simple joy of exercising outdoors, in good company, is the best medicine ever,' she added.

Bryn Haworth wrote his new song to inspire others to defend these special places. 'There's an area of historic woodland that has flourished for centuries close to where I live at Tattenham Corner with an abundance of wildlife,' he said.

'When I heard developers planned to demolish it and build a housing development, we were drawn into a battle to save it. It's up to us all to do whatever we can individually, so the following generations will have a beautiful earth to live on.'

## 'ROBOCROP' IS A CUT ABOVE THE REST

Remarks' about MMHS. No, he's not upset with us. Far from it. He's delighted with the Automower we supplied!

You may recall Dan and 'Robocrop' – as we affectionately named the machine – were the focus of a photostory in a past edition of *Roof 'n' Roots*. They also appeared in our 70th anniversary video. Now more than a year later, Dan has given us an update about his 'avant-gardener'.

Health issues and a vast lawn produced a challenging landscape for Dan and his wife Anne. To help them tame their plot in north-west England, our Maintenance Manager Glenn Fry came up with the idea of an Automower – a clever little robot that cuts grass.

'I confess I was a bit dubious,' said Dan. 'However, it only took a few hours of researching the subject to convince me it was a brilliant idea.' The chosen machine was the *Husqvarna 315X*. Initially, boundary and guide wires were installed in Dan's garden. Then an

onboard GPS system created a map of the lawn in the Automower's 'brain'. The Automower registered which parts of the garden it had covered and adjusted its pattern accordingly.

A phone app gives Dan full control of the mower. He can send commands, check and adjust settings. He can track his mower's position if it's stolen. 'Another benefit is being able to use the app to control or check on Robocrop when we're on holiday – wonderful,' said Dan.

'Although there was a period when mowing wasn't necessary, it has proved its worth at other times. Part of the therapy has been to watch the mower go in and out of its "house" automatically to be charged.

**What do we feel about robots and humans co-existing? The ethical debate on the use of robots is important. We should be part of that conversation. See 'SHARE YOUR VIEW' on the back cover...**



'Visitors have been amazed seeing it in action. The Automower has only stopped once - when it got stuck on a rather large apple! But the mower climbs any slopes in the lawn with ease. So thanks again, Glenn, for the support you and MMHS have given us.'

Property Services Director Godfried Addo was delighted to hear about Dan's positive experience. MMHS is open to such innovations to support our residents' wellbeing. 'We don't have any other hi-tech products at the moment,' said Godfried, 'but we do allow residents to fit the Hive wireless heating controls at their own cost.' ●



Photo: Forestry England

A music video was directed for Bryn's song by filmmaker Nigel Walk. Nigel has made many films about the planet for the BBC and National Geographic. To find out more – and to watch Bryn's new video and Kate's film – visit the MMHS website [www.mmhs.org.uk](http://www.mmhs.org.uk). ●

HUMBLE WALKS: Woodland walking is like meditation for TV presenter Kate Humble

SOUND PROJECT: Gospel blues artist Bryn Haworth sings to save our trees

Photo: Sally Haworth





Photo: Sony

POWER POOCH: Aibo, friend or foe?

## SHARE YOUR VIEW

### LIFESTYLE AND TECH BY MAIRI JOHNSTONE

They are everywhere. They are in operating theatres, factories – and our homes. Robots are among us.

Factories first embraced robots as long ago as 1961. *Unimate* was an arm attached to a giant steel drum and could pour, weld and manipulate payloads. It did dull, dangerous jobs with total accuracy.

Technological advances have come about, generally, to advance human interest. Their capacity to make things easier and improve our lives is huge. But there is a strong argument that technology needs to be kept in its place.

Many experts say, in the future, robots could be better caretakers for those who are older. Such machines could be programmed with endless patience, and would never be insulting, incompetent or dishonest.

Despite the clear benefits, well we might wonder how we'd feel about a piece of technology sharing our private space – or serving as a constant reminder of slipping cognitive skills. But what if that piece of technology enables us to live in our homes for longer?

Children are playing more and more with robotic and electronic toys. Remember the robotic dog *Aibo* that required children to look after it? The children ended up caring for the robot. A relationship was established.

Is the day coming when robots will become our friends? ●

# HOME TRUTHS

## REFLECTION BY GLYNN LISTER

It's a job to sing or listen to Verdi's *Nabucco* without being deeply moved. Based on the plight of the Jews in the biblical books of Jeremiah and Daniel, this is the opera of which Verdi said, 'This is where my artistic career really begins'.

The best-known number is *Chorus Of The Hebrew Slaves* or *Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate* – known by its popular English title *Speed Your Journey* – an epic chorus regularly encored in opera houses across the globe. It's a fantastic piece that 'gets' me every time I hear it or sing it.

**Prayer is like that.  
An opera that moves me,  
may well turn you off!**

Prayer is like that. An opera that moves me, may well turn you off! A contemporary worship song that excites you, may well bore me! And the way I choose to pray, could be different from how you decide to pray. When the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society asked me to write their new prayer resource *Octave*, I approached the project with that in mind – each to his or her own. Yet we can also find it helpful to have a starting point, even if we do venture off in different directions after beginning a prayer journey together.

I chose an 'octave' as it's been a Christian tradition since earliest times. From the Latin *octava* (eighth), 'octave' is the eighth day after a feast. The word is also applied to the eight-day period of the feast. In those pioneering centuries of the Church, octaves were created for Easter, Pentecost, Epiphany, Christmas, saints' days – and in modern times, the Octave Of Prayer For Christian Unity. Even The Beatles sang *Eight Days A Week!*

The MMHS *Octave* offers the same template for each of our own eight days – a reading, a prayer and an extract from a hymn. The idea behind such an approach is that if the prayer pattern is the same, then you can 'wear' it like a cosy suit or outfit. If you're at ease with



Photo: Clive Price

Revd Glynn Lister is an MMHS resident and a member of our Board. *Octave* is available from the MMHS website [www.mmhs.org.uk](http://www.mmhs.org.uk)

the pattern, you can spend more time on the content. *Octave* should be comfortable clothing, not a straitjacket. One person might find the reading enough to open up the way of prayer for them. Another person might want to look up the whole hymn and that will expand the prayer topic for them. Start somewhere and finish somewhere. If you get lost in the middle, that's fine, too.

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You might have a favourite spot where you feel you can pray – perhaps a fireside armchair, a kitchen bench or, on nice mornings, a corner of the garden. I don't have a set time or space for praying, though I do for Bible reading. I'm very much 'on the hoof'. Before I retired, I was on the road a lot to visits and meetings. I would play a compilation tape in the car and do some 'driving and devoting'. I found a recording of the Psalms and also used that.

Spend as little or as long a time on *Octave* as you feel is necessary. Prayer is all about letting your mind wander in the presence of God. Happy journeys! ●

