

September 3rd Slow Train Coming trip to Rogiet

We met on Cardiff Central Station for a fine day out in Rogiet, Monmouthshire, which sits next to Severn Tunnel Junction Railway Station. Before this trip, most of us had little or no idea of the important history of this small village, let alone knowing how to pronounce its name correctly.

We certainly knew nothing about the Community Cafe and Shop, which had been established by an inspirational group of local people in response to the closure of shops and post office and to make up for the lack of a space for social connection in Rogiet.

From the Severn Tunnel Junction Railway Station, we took a short walk to Rogiet Junction Community Cafe and Shop, spotting an old Tintern railway signal in a garden along our way. As we strolled up the footpath from Seaview Terrace, we noticed well attended and colourful allotments, festooned with rows of pumpkins, a testament to the time when Rogiet was established as a Garden Village by the GWR for its workers, between WW1 and WW2. We passed the modern sustainably built Primary School, established in 2010 for the growing needs of a rapidly expanding population. As we arrived at the lovely purpose built community cafe and shop, Fay Baxter, one of the inspirational founders of this flourishing public space, welcomed us.

Our large group was split into two for the first part of the visit. Fay took one of the groups on a short walk to St Mary's Church where she gave us a fascinating talk about the history of Rogiet and its Church. The western tower was visible as we neared St Mary's, where we heard about a large hoard of Roman coins which had been found in a nearby field. A ruined windmill in the distance pointed to Rogiet's rich agricultural past. Fay explained that St Mary's Church was built for Geoffrey de Gamages, the first lord of the manor in the thirteenth century. It has a nave and a chancel. The oldest feature in the beautiful building is the font which has an unusually large round bowl for such a small church. Many of us commented on the exquisite stained glass windows which Fay told us about in detail.

We had noticed an abandoned hotel boarded up along our way to the Church. Rogiet Hotel was once the drinking place for railway workers from the marshalling yards of Severn Tunnel Junction where, at one time, as many as 1000 men had been employed. The railway station had been established at Rogiet to transport building materials bound for the Severn Tunnel. Through it vast quantities of coal from the Welsh Valleys, agricultural goods, farm animals and steel were transported throughout the UK. We learnt how the 1987 goods yard closure led to the redundancies of many railwaymen, who stayed on in their railway cottages, leading to an ageing population. Later on, in the 1990s, new estates were built and Rogiet became a popular commuter town, close to Bristol, Cardiff and Newport.

Meanwhile, back at the Community Cafe, the rest of us were being looked after by the patient and efficient team at the cafe who served us with drinks and wonderful home baked cakes until it was our time to join Fay at St Mary's.

Thankyou to Fay and the brilliant team in Rogiet Junction Community Cafe . We all thought you were terrific! You will be very likely to see some of us again. Thankyou also to the community that was very welcoming to our large group.

We ended our time in Rogiet with a walk over the railway bridge and a visit to the Rogiet Countryside Park. Well displayed information boards and a map described the park from when it had been a huge, dirty and noisy marshalling ground to the gradual rewilding of the area that had occurred after the removal of tracks and railway buildings. We remarked on the noise of the traffic on the motorway close by and the fast trains speeding by. This is still an area full of sound.

On our walk, we found the terrace of houses that the railwaymen had lived in and the larger inspector's cottage at the end of the terrace.

We spotted four species of butterflies and were particularly fascinated by the clouded yellows as many of us hadn't seen them before. Large dragonflies caught our attention and we agreed it is a great place where community can enjoy the wild flower meadow and scrub which has recolonised the park, bearing the signs of oncoming autumn.

Our walk over, we made our way back over the bridge to the station where we caught our train home, now knowing that Rogiet is not said with a French accent!