



# TICKER NEWS

Official newsletter of the North Gwent Cardiac Rehabilitation & Aftercare Charity



## “My GP saved my life”

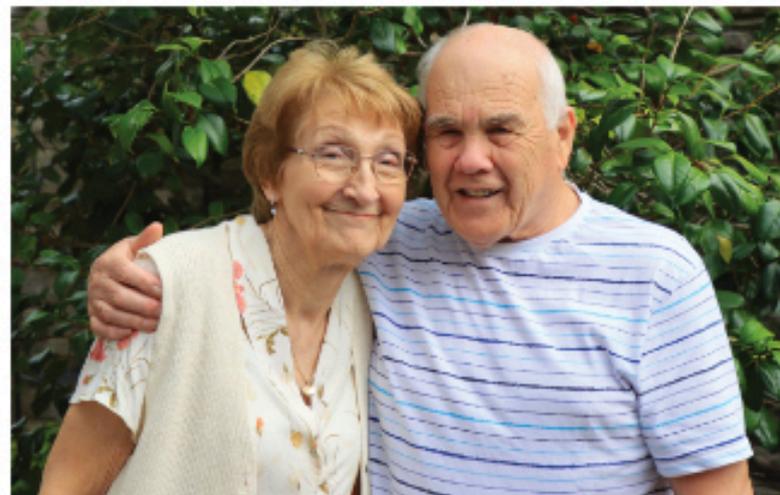
Llanfoist class member and keen photographer **Martin Wall** has an eye for a good image – but 14 years ago it took his GP to convince him that he was far from being a picture of health himself

**W**ith hindsight, Martin now knows that signs of a serious heart problem had started some two years earlier, in 2010, when he developed an ache in his neck for no obvious reason. A trip to his local Crickhowell surgery resulted in a course of tablets and the pain went away. But a few weeks later, while he was out walking his spaniel, he experienced a dull pain in his chest. “It was strange,” he recalls. “I wasn’t in agony, so it didn’t occur to me that it could be anything serious, but it did give me a bad feeling.”

The pain eased, and despite some lingering discomfort Martin carried on life as normal – working, walking the dog and spending time with his wife Glenis and young granddaughter, Torri. It was only when he was woken in the early hours by another bout of chest pain that Martin decided to seek help.

He was referred to a heart specialist, who told him he needed further tests. “He said I might need medication, or stents, or even a bypass, but that he wouldn’t know the best way forward until he’d done a coronary angiogram.”

But while Martin was waiting for his appointment, the neck pain returned. “I went to see my regular GP and she took one look at me and said: ‘You do not look good.’ She examined me



*Llanfoist class member Martin Wall with his wife Glenis*

and listened to my chest, and then told me she was sending me straight to Nevill Hall for an emergency angiogram.

“It was a bit of shock,” says Martin. “But that decision saved my life.” At the hospital, worse news was to come. “The cardiologist who did the angiogram stopped the procedure part-way >>

## What is a coronary angiogram?

A **coronary angiogram** allows your cardiologist to see what’s going on in the arteries supplying your heart. The conventional procedure takes around 20-30 minutes and is carried out in a catheter laboratory, which looks a bit like an X-ray room.

It starts with your cardiologist making a small cut in your wrist or groin so they can insert a long narrow tube (called a

catheter) into an artery. They slide the tube up the artery towards your heart and use it to inject a contrast dye that shows up under X-ray. Then they use a special X-ray camera to create a detailed 3D image. This reveals where your arteries are narrowed or blocked, and how badly, and helps your cardiologist decide what treatment you need. You will usually be allowed to go home the same day.

There is also a newer, non-invasive procedure called a **CT angiogram**, where you lie very still inside a 3D scanner. A contrast dye is injected into a vein in your arm and then the scanner camera goes to work, building up a 3D image of your coronary arteries. The image is less detailed though, so if it does show signs of heart disease, your consultant may need to send you for a follow-up catheter angiogram.

<< through and said I wouldn't survive the weekend without urgent intervention."

Martin's condition worsened rapidly. He was admitted to the hospital's Intensive Therapy Unit (ITU) but it was three weeks before he was stable enough to be transferred to Cardiff for triple bypass surgery. "I remember the ambulance journey," he says with a smile. "They had the blues and twos on all the way."

There was another rocky moment a few days after surgery when he went into cardiac arrest and was technically dead for 13 minutes. "After that, the possibility of going home seemed very remote; I was so weak I couldn't see how I'd ever feel strong enough to leave hospital. So it was a bit of a surprise when one of the team told me that if I could get myself fit enough to walk down the hall and climb a flight of stairs, I'd be allowed to go home."

That flipped a switch on his recovery and eight weeks after his op, Martin made it up the stairs and was discharged home. Six weeks later he started Phase 3 cardiac rehab at Nevill Hall, and when that ended, he joined our Phase 4 classes.

"I've never really been into sport, and to be honest, I've never liked exercise much either. So when I started the Phase 4

classes, it was in a pretty grudging kind of way. But there was something the instructor said in that first class that really struck me. He said 'Most people who come here can extend their lives by eight years or more.' My granddaughter Torri was just four at the time, and I really wanted to watch her grow up. So that was my incentive.

"Coming to these classes has been absolutely the best thing I have ever done – for loads of reasons. The exercise is really important, obviously. I always feel that it stirs me up for the rest of the week, and it's definitely helped me stay well and active. I'm 76 now, and busier than I've ever been, including caring for my elderly mother.

"The classes have been good for my mental wellbeing, too. They're a safe place, and you meet people from all walks of life. I've made some really good friends over the years, and that emotional support has been really important to me.

"Torri will be 18 this summer, and Glenis and I now have three more grandchildren, so I consider myself a very lucky man – and I honestly believe I owe my continuing good health to the cardiac rehab classes. I say to everyone who starts in Phase 4, 'You owe it to yourself, and if you don't keep going you're a damn fool!'"

## 2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT



We were delighted to welcome a distinguished guest speaker to our November AGM. **Linda Edmunds MBE** (pictured left) is Consultant Nurse for Heart Failure and Cardiac Rehab with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.

Linda's talk focused on the importance of listening to patients, and she told us how this approach has

helped her team gather the evidence they needed to secure long-term funding to provide a more holistic and integrated service for heart patients.

This, in turn, has:

- ✓ streamlined appointments and reduced waiting times
- ✓ helped get patients on the right medication faster
- ✓ helped patients to better self-manage their symptoms
- ✓ reduced hospital readmissions
- ✓ helped patients enjoy a better quality of life.

And that's good news for everyone!

The AGM itself covered a challenging year for our Charity. Losing three instructors in quick succession in the first half of 2025 was a real blow. But with new instructors in place, a trainee instructor recruited (see story opposite) and growing class numbers, we're looking to a brighter future.

For the full round up, go to [cardiac-rehab.org.uk](http://cardiac-rehab.org.uk) and click on the ABOUT tab to read our 2025 AGM Report and Notes.

## Tri a new challenge

Welsh Triathlon has recognised Ebbw Vale's **Clayton Shorthouse Memorial Triathlon** with a special Inclusivity Award. We're the proud beneficiaries of this annual entry-level triathlon, so it's great to know that this year's event, on 23 August, will allow even more people to take part, with swim-run short-course options for children and a relay event for teams of three adults.

Fancy entering solo or as part of a team? Llanfoist class instructor **Tom Stone** has already thrown his hat into the ring, as has friend of the charity **Ruth Cornish** (see back page). Find out more about the race options, and how to enter, at [britishtriathlon.org](http://britishtriathlon.org).

## Stayin' alive with the BGBGNs

Want an easy way to reduce your cholesterol, stabilise your blood sugar levels and cut your risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, Type-2 diabetes and even some cancers? The answer is to eat more fibre-packed BGBGNs:

- ✓ Beans & pulses (tinned are fine!)
- ✓ Greens (fresh or frozen)
- ✓ Berries (fresh or frozen)
- ✓ Grains (preferably wholegrains)
- ✓ Nuts & seeds



Government guidelines say we need 30g of fibre a day – yet 96% of us are getting way less. Enjoy a variety of tasty BGBGNs every day, though, and you'll reach your fibre target effortlessly.

# Meet our new trainee instructor!

Last year the Trustees agreed to provide funding to help up to two new recruits gain their Specialist Exercise Instructor qualification through the British Association for Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation (BACPR).

The course, which costs £675 per person, is widely recognised as the gold standard for cardiac rehab. That's why we insist all our exercise instructors are BACPR qualified.

It's a demanding programme designed for experienced exercise professionals, and we're delighted to have recruited our first trainee – **Marietta Segá** (pictured right).

Marietta currently runs two private fitness classes alongside her day job as a sports cover supervisor at various local schools. Originally from Venezuela, she spent time in Sheffield, Barcelona, Portsmouth and

Bristol before settling in Llangynidr with her husband and their two young children.

"I started out wanting to be an architect and ended up specialising in 3-D computer aided design," she says. "But I've always been very sporty, and exercise is my passion, so when a friend suggested a few years back that I'd make a good fitness instructor, I realised it just made sense!"

Marietta started the BACPR course back in January and hopes to complete her training by early summer. Llanfoist class instructor Tom Stone will provide mentoring and support along the way.

Marietta will also gain valuable practical experience shadowing Tom during classes and has already provided support with our Biannual Fitness Assessments. Thank you for making her welcome!



## Tom's key take-homes from BACPR conference



Llanfoist class instructor **Tom Stone** attended the BACPR's annual two-day conference in Glasgow last October. Here are his highlights...

The BACPR annual conference is a unique opportunity for cardiac rehab professionals to hear from a broad range of experts, including updates on new research, new technologies and better ways of working. It's also a great way to meet

people from other cardiac rehab teams and share ideas. Keeping up to date with working practices is really important to me, because it helps me deliver the best service I possibly can.

The conference covered a lot of ground, with prevention a recurrent theme. These are my top three take-homes:

**1 Lifestyle.** Lifestyle change is still the most powerful tool in prevention. Dr Jamie O'Driscoll reminded us that exercise is a very effective way to reduce high blood pressure. He said every 10mmHg reduction in systolic blood pressure (that's the top number on your blood pressure reading) equates to a major decrease in cardiovascular events.

**2 Innovation.** Worldwide just one-third of eligible heart patients receive cardiac rehab, so technological advances such as digital apps and wearable devices that help patients monitor and better self manage their health could be a game-changer. That said, we know face-to-face contact is still really important for many patients, with psychological support a key part of helping people rebuild confidence and manage fear so they can start exercising safely and effectively.

**3 Integrated care.** People entering cardiac rehab often have other complex health problems, such as diabetes, lung disease, kidney issues and cancer. So it was good to hear from several experts working to develop a more joined-up and holistic approach. For patients there are obvious benefits, including combined appointments and more integrated management of medication.

### BLAENAVON CLASS UPDATE

Exercise instructor **Joe Lane** took over our Blaenavon class in October and says members have made excellent progress...

"Class members start off with a group warm up before moving on to their individual circuits using the cardiovascular machines and the free weights for strength training. Then we regroup for a gentle cool down before everyone sets off home for a well-deserved cuppa.

"I've thoroughly enjoyed getting to know this class: the members have a lovely rapport with one another and create a really welcoming and supportive atmosphere each week. They even arranged a mini celebration for our final session before Christmas, with post-workout coffee and cake.

"It's great working with such a committed bunch, and they've made good progress with their exercise since resuming classes after the festive break. I'm looking forward to helping them progress further in 2026, and hope we can welcome in more new members from the local community."





## Fundraising concerts hit the right note



Our charity was the beneficiary of two fabulous fundraising concerts staged late last year.

The first event, on 11 November, was a special Remembrance Day concert hosted by the **Tredegar Orpheus Male Voice Choir**. There was a full house for the Choir's

stirring programme of classic hymns, contemporary favourites and popular wartime songs, with guest singer **Stephanie Webber** adding extra sparkle with a polished set of musical-theatre hits.

Our Trustee **Gareth Davies** and his wife **Andrea** donated a hamper brimming with tasty Welsh treats for the raffle, and all told the evening raised a fantastic **£1,000** for us.

*Above: Tredegar Orpheus Chair Trevor White (left) presents a cheque for £600 to Trustee Neil Gregory (right)*

There was a surprise bonus for us, too, as members of the **Siloh Uniting Church** who attended the concert followed up with a generous **£500** donation from their congregation.

Then, on 16 December, we joined **Crickhowell Choral Society** for their annual Community Carols event at St Edmunds Church. Families packed into the beautiful 13th century church to enjoy carols with the choir and special performances from local primary school children and the Society's talented Choral Scholars.

There was generous support for the raffle, for a magnificent Christmas hamper donated by Trustee **Neil Gregory** of G.O.S. Tool & Engineering Services. And coupled with the donations we received during the interval for mulled wine and mince pies, we banked a very welcome **£1,246**. Thank you to everyone who supported these events.

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## Will you buy the winning ticket?

February is **National Heart Month**, and to celebrate we're offering you a chance to win this bumper hamper. Kindly donated by Trustee **Neil Gregory** of Blaenavon-based G.O.S. Tool & Engineering Services, it's packed full of tempting treats. And with goodies including wine, Welsh whisky, cookies, chocolate and more, this hamper is made for sharing.

Tickets cost £1 each or £5 per strip and are available from **Class Assistant Allen Cleveland**, or call **07538 263 824**. We'll be drawing the raffle on 21 February, so you'll need to be quick. **Good luck!**



March

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## Fancy a massage?

Massage therapist and former nurse **Ruth Cornish**, who runs Crickhowell's Rowan Massage, is hosting a pop-up Massage Day from 10am-4pm on Sunday 1 March as a

fundraiser for us. Ruth will be offering relaxing 30-minute massages at the Wellness Room on Standard Street in return for donations, with all proceeds going to aid our work in the community. To book, call Ruth on **07861 684 142**.

The Massage Day is one of six fundraisers Ruth is taking on for us this year to mark her 60th birthday.

She's also aiming to enter the Clayton Shorthouse Memorial Triathlon on 23 August (see page 2), run-walk the South Wales Three Peaks Trial route, and more!

To follow her progress and sponsor her, go to [justgiving.com](http://justgiving.com) and search for Ruth Cornish.



## ENTER OUR 2026 POTATO GROWING CHALLENGE

Flex those green fingers and get set to grow because our annual **Potato Growing Challenge** kicks off next month. Kindly sponsored by the Abergavenny Garden Centre, this year's kits will be available through our classes and from our pop-up stall at the Garden Centre on the weekends of 14-15 March and 21-22 March.

Entry costs £5 and includes a 10L pot and single seed potato, with the aim being to grow the heaviest harvest of spuds by Saturday 11 July, when we'll be back at the Garden Centre to empty out your pots, weigh up the results and hand out the prizes.

There are two classes: Children (under 16) and Adults (16 and above), with Garden Centre voucher prizes awarded as follows:

**Children**  
1<sup>st</sup> prize: £10 voucher  
2<sup>nd</sup> prize: £5 voucher

**Adults**  
1<sup>st</sup> prize: £20 voucher  
2<sup>nd</sup> prize: £15 voucher

March  
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