

Retreat Muse

From *A Place to Write*

Welcome to Issue 2

This edition, recognising our nomination for a *Go North Wales Tourism* award (page 3), includes news on other exciting developments in Corwen, at Bron Y Graig and within *A Place to Write*. Wendy and I are so grateful to those of you—you know who you are—who have shared with us your expertise away from writing, to help us develop and expand our brand and find sustainable ways to build our business. Our plans for the future, as always, are in response to your invaluable input and feedback.

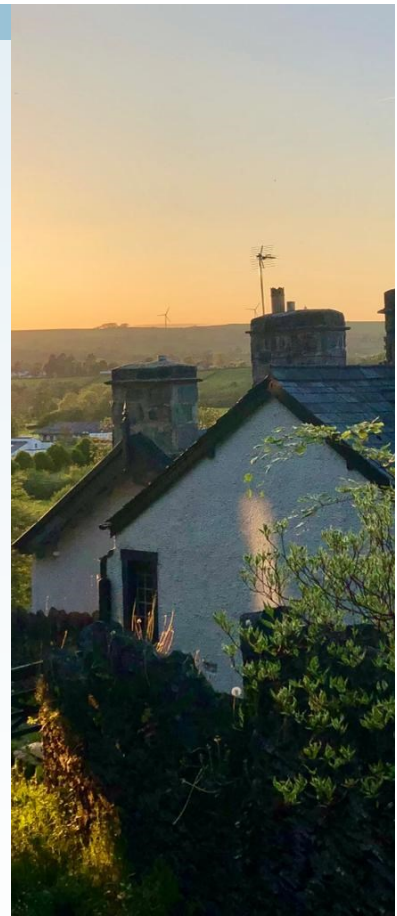
At the heart of this issue, reflecting what we hope is the heart of *A Place to Write*, is a piece by Carolyn Fulls, a retreat-er in February 2024 who arrived not knowing whether she would even write or not, but who has proven to be an exciting and powerful new voice in the field. You can read about her experience on pages 4-5.

Elsewhere, this issue also includes an update on our first, highly successful, Shakespeare retreats, along with a brief profile of a popular re-retreat-er, and my latest blog on choosing the right retreat for you. Finally, the top tip this time around might be useful for anyone faced with the task of reducing (or increasing) the length of their novel by a significant percentage, as one retreat-er this autumn was required to do.

As always, if you have any feedback on this newsletter or—more importantly—a contribution to make to any future one, please don't hesitate to get in touch. I have four newsletters to fill in 2025 and your contributions are so much more interesting and varied than mine!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,

Nic



Inside this issue

Developments in Corwen.....	2
Tracey Mathias	2
Go North Wales Awards.....	3
Blog Update.....	3
Carolyn Fulls.....	4
Shakespeare Retreat Update	5
Top Tip for Writers.....	6

Special points of interest

- Special offer for all past retreat-ers: see page 2—'Spring 2025 Dates Online' for details
- Spring programme selling fast: - book today to avoid disappointment. Summer and Autumn programme for the rest of 2025 will be published soon.
- Next issue of this newsletter due in early March 2025: submit content today!

Developments in Corwen

This summer the Corwen Community Trust managed to secure and complete the purchase of the historic Owain Glyndwr Hotel in the middle of town. With significant investment from the levelling up fund, and the support of other public and private groups and individuals, the trust are now gradually refurbishing and re-opening parts of the hotel in stages. The redevelopment offers an important opportunity for Corwen—both to rediscover something of its historic importance and to help move the town forward after the ravages of Covid et al. In time, the Owain Glyndwr will provide many more beds for tourists in the summer season and, while Bron Y Graig will always have the best views (!), the prospect of increased competition for tourists in the town has informed many of our decisions around our retreat programme: as well as creating business throughout the year (the tourist season is very short in North Wales), our retreats obviously also operate in a market which is not as crowded—in

Corwen at least - as the hospitality market will shortly be. It is for this reason that we have been developing other retreats alongside our Writing Retreats (Shakespeare/Christmas/Well-being/etc) and why, in 2025, we have decided to go for something of a rebrand.

A guest on our most recent retreat remarked that the words 'Guest House' might be a little small on our roadside signs. We agree! But instead of simply making the words 'Guest House' bigger, we will be commissioning signs that present us as a retreat centre, first and foremost, and—perhaps—as a guest house alongside that. This shift in emphasis will, we believe, help us make more sense when advertising our increasing range of retreats across the UK and further afield: a Shakespeare Retreat hosted by *A Place to Write* gives the impression it is a retreat for writers who love Shakespeare (which it isn't). However, since the name Bron Y Graig is not associat-

ed with any specific form of retreat, we believe it will help us in our quest to develop a year-round programme of bespoke retreats, often nothing to do with writing.

We will not be surrendering or changing the *A Place to Write* brand though: our writing retreats will continue to be marketed under this name and the website and all the other tools and features associated with our primary brand, including this newsletter, will continue as always. Writing Retreats will always be at the centre of what we do—if we could fill a writing retreat every week of the year, we would! However, the variety of retreat will also bring benefits—including further resilience as a business, and we are excited by the direction things are heading.

If you have any thoughts, or advice, relating to these changes, we would love to receive your feedback and hear your thoughts.

'I have had a brilliant stimulating break and will definitely return'

Jeni Gardner, December 2024

Spring 2025 Dates Online

Don't forget that our spring 2025 retreats are now online and bookable. Our programme for the rest of 2025 will be published soon. As a special thank you to all of you who have helped grow us to this point*, we are offering a £150 discount on the full price of any room for any of our spring 2025 retreats taking place in the months from January to April. Use the code OFFER150 at checkout and the deposit will be reduced by £50 with a further £100 deducted from the balance of payment due.

*Offer only available for returning retreaters to Bron Y Graig

Tracey Mathias (January and November 2024)

News about a Retreater

Tracey first joined us at *A Place to Write* at the beginning of 2024 when, at the end of a wet week, the Rhug Estate was flooded and our attempt to walk round it (there is a delightful trek along the river, past a field of Bison) almost ended in disaster as we clambered along a narrow verge, clinging to a hedge to avoid a deep puddle on the footpath... Riaz, one of the other two retreaters on that walk, had wisely worn wellies and danced through the water with ease. Tracey, myself and Bella (the third retreater) risked a soaking as we clung for dear life to weak branches and hauled ourselves along the raised verge, with deep water less than a metre away. It was fun though and, as an old colleague of mine in education used to say, 'something for the memoirs'. But Tracey does not currently write memoirs: she is a hugely successful writer for children and young adults whose work has taken her far and wide over the course of her career. It is for this reason that Wendy and I were especially delighted to welcome Tracey back in November on our sold out untutored retreat. Not only is Tracey a tremendously experienced retreater but she is also a delightful dinner companion. Her willingness to share her experiences and yet, more often, to listen to and encourage the writers around her, makes Tracey a perfect fit for us and she seems to feel the same way too: Tracey has already taken advantage of our special offer for returning retreaters (see column to the left of this article) and will be joining us once again on our nearly sold out February Untutored retreat. You can find out more about Tracey and her work at www.traceymathias.com



Table plan for North Wales Awards—A Place to Write is on Table 40!

Go North Wales Awards

In November, while Wendy and I were sunning ourselves in Malta, Emily Barroso and her daughter represented *A Place to Write* at the *Go North Wales Tourism* awards in Llandudno. The evening comprised a black-tie dinner followed by an awards ceremony and then dancing till late. Emily advised that she and her daughter rocked up in their glad rags at Llandudno Station in stormy conditions but made it to the venue and had a great evening networking on our behalf.

A Place to Write was nominated, shortlisted and one of the four finalists for the ‘Innovation and Resilience’ award, in recognition of our development of a writing retreat alongside our guest house business. The nomination noted the way in which our retreats were helping us establish a secure footing in an insecure hospitality market. North Wales has seen many leisure and hospitality venues close recently and yet here we are, despite our own immense challenges with interest rates, energy costs and the cost of living, building a business that we hope will become firmly established in North Wales. We didn’t win the award but it was great to have our name and product out there and thank you to Emily and her daughter for representing us so well!

The Blog

My most recent blog entry—published this past week—focuses on the choices facing someone who is looking to go on a writing retreat. It is titled [‘What’s the right writing retreat for you?’](#) and was suggested by Jay Devlin (November 2024). Jay’s suggestion made a lot of sense to me: hearing stories of other retreats, coupled with the ongoing research we do around the retreat market, gave me quite a few pointers about the issues, questions and choices facing a would-be retreator. We have ‘boosted’ the advert for this blog and seen an immediate response in terms of likes, shares and tagging that suggest there are potentially many people who would appreciate some insights into different ‘writing retreats’ before booking one.

If you get a chance to read the blog—or if it appears on your Facebook or Instagram timeline at some stage—let me know what I missed out or got wrong! Of course, if you like it and know anyone who might benefit from seeing it, please don’t hesitate to like, share, tag or simply add a comment. It will be much appreciated. And thank you Jay for the idea!

[Jay also introduced me, although she might not have realized it, to the phenomenon that is [Squaredle...](#) a totally absorbing, challenging, frustrating puzzle that takes up far too much of my time. Thank you Jay!]

February 25th I made my way up to Bron Y Graig, with no idea what the writing retreat I had found online would entail. Having already postponed my place from November, a reassuring call from Nic had given some warmth to my cold feet. And here I was, on my way. Writing had not been part of my life, nor had any calibre of reading. A childhood of Enid Blyton, a scraped through O Level English Lit and an adulthood of beach worthy novels summed up my literary experience. But the previous five years had been a particularly challenging season for me and I had, surprisingly to me, for the first time ever found solace in journalling. What I couldn't make sense of in my head seemed to have a way of being able to make it out onto paper. Writing had kept me sane.

I no longer needed to journal to the same extent, but had a sense I had more to write. So I had searched for a writing course, to explore if there could be a project I could turn my pen towards. The promise of amazing scenery and warm hospitality, along with the encouraging phone call from Nic, made going to Bron Y Graig an obvious choice. If nothing else it would be a peaceful few days away in a beautiful location.

Driving in I could see that Corwen was as stunning as described. Welcomed by Nic and Wendy, into their beautiful home, I felt their warmth and knew whatever the retreat held this would be a very safe and peaceful place to be. Settling into my room, I knew that I had found a gem of a place to come to.

Meeting up with others in the group, initially I felt a little insecure as I realised they all had a more comprehensive literary knowledge than me and were already in the midst of, or seemingly confidently embarking upon, their own books and projects. But the welcome and acceptance soon overrode my felt inadequacy and it became a rich group experience to be a part of.

As part of the retreat, we had a one-to-one session with Emily, with an option to send her some of our own writing before talking with her. I didn't have the confidence to send her any writing. I didn't even know what I wanted out of our conversation, but I decided to see her regardless. I am so grateful that I did. Little did I know that it would be one of those life changing turn in the road moments.

I immediately felt at ease as our conversation started.

Talking about what my personal writing had meant to me, I felt an immediate resonance and understanding from Emily. I felt she saw the depth of gift journalling had been to me over these years. My lack of confidence and inadequacy soon began to transform into some kind of anticipation of what might be. An excitement that maybe my writing voice didn't need to be silenced. I felt she saw something in me that I couldn't yet grasp. I don't think I left our conversation with a plan but definitely with hope of sparks of a new fire being ignited.

The rest of the retreat was memorable; walks in the stunning surroundings, fabulous meals, great conversations, helpful workshops, continually trying to glean as much as I could from the experience of those around me. An evening by candlelight where Nic memorably shared some of his writings, along with others in the group. I joined them, having enough confidence now to share something I had recently written. It was a very special evening. The encouragement I received spurred me on as we went our separate ways the following day.

I drove home grateful for the time I had spent there. Nic and Wendy's home and hospitality is quite remarkable. I didn't yet know where writing would take me next but I knew there was a next.

Over the next few days, as I settled back into life, thoughts mulled around in my head and began to form a cohesive idea. I felt excited and slightly overwhelmed. I believed I had a possible idea for a book but I knew I needed help.

With encouragement from a friend who had heard me regaling stories about the weekend, I found Emily's website and to my delight discovered she did give personal mentoring sessions. A few emails later we had our first session on 7 March, the best birthday present I've ever given myself.

I tried to describe the idea for the book I believed was in me as best I could. I didn't have great clarity yet. I knew it may sound farfetched or unconvincing but from the get go, I felt an incredible connection to Emily. Like she totally got some of what I couldn't yet put into words. As we finished that first session, I came off my computer and erupted with excitement. We were on. I was going to write a book and Emily had agreed

to be my developmental editor. The excitement I felt was uncontainable.

That was eight months ago. It has continued to be a challenging season in life, but working on this book has often been the lighthouse that has shone its light to guide me through the stormy seas with its unseen and often treacherous rocks.

The book I am writing is a fictional one, but it is immensely personal to me. It is writing that requires a complete trust in the process of its emergence. A depth of trust that Emily joins with me in, as a wise mentor but also a fellow traveller. That's what blows my mind. I wouldn't have dreamed I could have found someone in the writing world that I could entrust my

story and myself with to such a great extent.

I would whole heartedly recommend *A Place to Write* retreat, whatever stage of writing/not writing anyone is at. For me, going there began the most incredible journey that I am now on. And I would whole heartedly recommend working with Emily.

The process of writing this book, regardless of finished outcome, is the biggest gift of all. It is an honouring and giving voice to parts of me that were never able to be spoken out. It is truly a healing of my soul.

I feel privileged and grateful for the turn in the road going to Bron Y Graig brought into my life.

Nic, Wendy, my fellow retreaters and Emily – thank you.

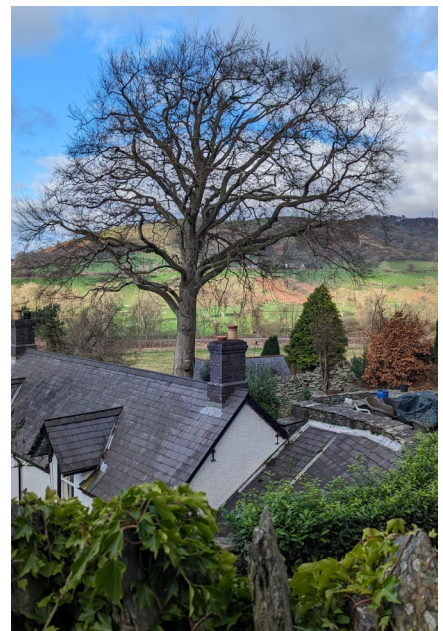
'A Place to Write provides the aspiring author with the environment and support to propel them on their writing journey' - Bob Hinshelwood, December 2024

This autumn we ran our first two Shakespeare retreats for Shakespeare enthusiasts, with great success. The programme for these retreats combines play readings in the mornings with a subsequent series of workshops, zoom interviews and screened versions of the plays. There is also plenty of time for retreaters to get out and explore Corwen and the surrounding area.

These first two retreats focused on specific genres: comedy and tragedy. We were delighted to discover that our first intake included several teachers, a podcaster, an amateur theatre director and a few holidaymakers looking for a break with a difference. One of these was Julia from America who fitted in the retreat

around her other holiday activities. On both retreats we enjoyed the input of Lizzie Conrad-Hughes, director of ShakeScene Shakespeare (who perform the plays with minimal rehearsal, using individual parts for each actor—as Shakespeare's company did), and the humour and passion of John Mitton from Shit-Faced Shakespeare (sharing some of the do's and don'ts of performing with someone who is drunk).

We are currently tweaking the format of these retreats in response to feedback and suggestions, but the unanimous response of our guests was that these are an excellent, stimulating, valuable addition to our burgeoning retreat programme.



A Place to Write

If you have any ideas for future content, or something you don't mind sharing in this newsletter, please email it me at any time: news snippets, articles, stories, poems, tips, advice or even just a shout out to people from your past retreat who you would like to hear from.

The next issue is due out at the beginning of March 2025 so submissions by the 20th February 2025 would be very gratefully received. Nothing is too long or short: even a brief hello and update on your latest activity is interesting for your fellow retreaters.

Just email info@aplacetowrite.co.uk with your contribution—today, or anytime.

Top Tip for Writers

On a recent retreat a writer described the challenge of reducing the length of their novel by around 20,000 words (due to the current demands of their agent/publisher. This represented a 25% reduction in length. It seems that shorter novels may be required moving forward—both because of end-user demands (shorter novels are less intimidating for a reader than long ones) and because of publishing costs (longer novels use more paper and take more time to process). The writer in question's challenge was to reduce the story without it becoming clunky. Naturally the bits most easy to cut might be parts where a description or an incident add colour and texture to character or theme, but do not particularly develop the plot. What might remain is a plot heavy but denuded tale with little colour or texture.

In considering this question, the way in which inexperienced young writers work is informative: teenagers writing stories for GCSE English Language will often try to write an adventure story with loads of incident, many changes of location and multiple shifts in and across time. This is all well and good in itself (there are many successful novels that follow this pattern), provided there are enough words to tell the tale in appropriate detail. Of course, with a student in a classroom there is never enough time to get down enough words to make their envisioned story anything more than a jumble of unexplained, hard to follow, thoroughly confusing cliches. And that's the key: the length of a story is, in part at least, determined by the complexity of the plot and the quantity of incidents and characters that it involves. The more characters and incidents (and settings and time periods, etc) the more words will be needed to tell that story appropriately. So if you have to reduce a story significantly, it is quite likely to be about cutting characters and events—essentially reframing the whole story—rather than merely editing, or slashing, copious words...

A Place to Write

Bron Y Graig
London Road
Coprwen
Denbighshire
LL210DR

Phone: 07359 319055
E-mail: info@aplacetowrite.co.uk

STOP PRESS:

Our February 2025 Untutored retreat and our March 2025 Tutored retreat each have just one room left at time of writing. If you are thinking of joining one of these, book today before they are sold out. Our other spring retreats currently still have a selection of rooms available but our historic booking data suggests that there will be a distinct shortage of rooms by the time each retreats begins. Don't delay, re-book today and use the code OFFER150 to save £150 on the total cost of your room.

