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Shopping in Gwynedd: one county, hundreds of shopping experiences

Originally published in October 2015

They say variety is the spice of life... that's certainly the case when it comes to shopping in Gwynedd!

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One of the nicest things about shopping in Gwynedd is the sheer variety of different shopping experiences you can have in the space of one day.

Take Porthmadog, for example.

When you rummage around the shops in Porthmadog, you could be buying fresh game from Joe Lewis one minute, and shopping for kitchen equipment or toys at historic department store Kerfoots the next.

Take a little stroll further down the street and you're buying exquisite dinnerware at the Portmeirion shop, before popping next door to Vegonia Wholefoods for something to serve on your new plates.

From Porthmadog it's a quick hop to Pwllheli, where you can support local artists by buying a piece or two from the Tonnau gallery before nipping into Siop Eluned for locally crafted gifts. And if you're really into arts and crafts, you can stock up on crafting materials just across the road at Oriel Pwlldefaid, where you'll also find a beautiful selection of children's clothing and toys.

Catch the number 12 bus from Pwllheli to Caernarfon - it won't take long; about half an hour, and you'll see some stunning countryside along the way - and browse books at Palas Print (you can enjoy a great cup of coffee while you flick through the books you've bought), before heading next door to Lotti and Wren, a veritable Aladdin's cave of clothing, jewellery, gifts and generally fabulous trinkets.

It's not just in Gwynedd's towns that you can enjoy a great shopping experience; they come in surprising guises, sometimes.

Take Glasfryn Parc, for example. On your drive past the gates you'd be forgiven for thinking it's all about the go-karts and archery, but if you explore properly you'll discover the wonderful farm shop selling meat, fruit and veg produced on the park's sprawling estate.

A trip to Glynllifon isn't just a walk through the woods; it's discovering artisan home goods from all over Wales at Adra, or treating yourself to stunning jewellery made on site at the craft workshops. There's a surprise at every turn.

It's the same story all over Gwynedd. It's the little independent businesses that seem to have most to offer. Sure, you won't come away with bag after bag of mass-produced tat from the other side of the world that some poor soul's been paid a couple of pennies to make. But what you will take home is the warm glow of knowing that your day at the shops has helped a local crafter pay for their child's school trip, or has put food on a local shopkeeper's table for another day - and all the imported 'bargains' in the world can't beat that feeling.

Where's your favourite place to shop in Gwynedd, and why? Let us know in the comments below!

Three options for creating a local currency

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As we've replied in our frequently asked questions, a county-wide local currency in a county as large as Gwynedd would be extremely difficult to manage.

But local currencies certainly work well in geographically smaller communities - so there's no reason why businesses in Porthmadog couldn't create the Port Pound, or why businesses in Caernarfon couldn't introduce a Cofi Coin!

Here are three different types of local currency that individual communities in Gwynedd could introduce to help strengthen their local economies.

Cash currencies

Using a local cash currency, the issuing authority would print up 'banknotes' in denominations of their choice - for example, £1 notes, £5 notes, £10 notes and so on. Shoppers can exchange their Sterling currency for local currency notes at designated exchange points.

Several UK communities are already doing this; for example, there are Lewes Pounds, Brixton Pounds, Bristol Pounds, Stroud Pounds and Totnes Pounds.

Local currencies can only be spent in the local area, which means that money stays circulating in the local economy - helping to keep local people in work, among many other benefits.

Some issuers of local currencies provide incentives for shoppers to use the local currency instead of Sterling. For example, they might offer an attractive exchange rate which makes the local currency worth a little more than Sterling. Shoppers might pay 90p Sterling for one local pound, meaning they save 10% in any shop that accepts the local currency.

Businesses that agree to accept the local currency would of course lose out a little in the exchange process. But most of them, given the choice, would prefer to make a sale at 10% discount than to not make a sale at all - and in doing so, they are able to continue employing their staff, or buying their supplies from other local businesses, so the money stays in the economy and benefits everybody.

Electronic currencies

Of course, people don't always shop in cash. In this day and age, it's likely that we'll shop using debit or credit cards, or some other electronic method (such as PayPal or text message) - so how can local currencies keep up with the times and entice customers who prefer to pay without using cash?

In Brixton, local council employees can opt to have part of their wages paid in Brixton Pounds instead of Sterling. They can then pay their Council Tax in Brixton Pounds, and can make payments to local traders using text messages, meaning they don't have to carry cash - whether Sterling or local currency - at all. Here's a short video of this in action:

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/29565876>

Time as currency

Time can also be a tradeable commodity. In some communities, people use a 'LETS', which stands for 'local exchange trading system'. Using their LETS, members of the community have a virtual 'bank' into which they can pay in and take out hours.

Let's say that Iwan is a plumber. He provides ten hours of plumbing services for free to Llinos, the local hairdresser. In effect, Iwan has made a 'deposit' of ten hours, and is entitled to 'withdraw' ten hours from another member of the local LETS. Llinos, on the other hand, has 'withdrawn' ten hours, and therefore must provide ten hours' worth of hairdressing services to another member of the LETS in order to redress the balance.

This is just one example of how a LETS might work. Other members could include copywriters, lawyers, website designers, gardeners or chefs - anybody who is prepared to provide a service in exchange for receiving an equal number of hours' service from another LETS member.

Could a local currency work for your community?

If you're a business owner and part of a local networking group or business support group, it's worth talking to your fellow members to see if a local currency could work for your community.

If you'd like some help in looking at different local currency ideas and evaluating which would work best for your community, or if you've already decided which system you'd like to use but need some help in setting it up, please contact us and we'll tell you what sort of support we're able to offer.

Recommended reading

The above are just three examples of local currencies; there are others to explore before you make your decision. The following links are to articles on other websites that explain more about buying locally as a concept, and how local currencies work. Please note that Gwynedd Council is not responsible for the content of external websites.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/8245276.stm>

<https://www.transitionnetwork.org/tools/building/tools-plugging-leaks>

<http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/the-money-trail>

<http://www.reconomy.org/economic-enablers/alternative-means-of-exchange/complementary-currencies/>

<http://www.reconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Lewes-Pound-How-To-Guide.pdf>

Buy Local Gwynedd official launch at the Portmeirion Christmas Fair

Originally published in December 2015

Saturday 5th December was an apt date for the official launch of Buy Local Gwynedd, as it was the first shopping day of December - nationally recognised as Small Business Saturday.

Small Business Saturday (<https://www.smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com>) is a campaign that has been running for several years in the UK, which aims to encourage consumers to shop locally or from small businesses, instead of always shopping at global or national chains.

According to the Small Business Saturday website, the campaign in 2015 was very successful:

- Customers spent £623m with small businesses on Small Business Saturday, an increase of £119m or 24% on 2014
- #SmallBizSatUK trended at number 1 all day on Small Business Saturday with over 100,000 tweets sent in support of the day, reaching more than 25 million people
- Over 75% of local councils actively supported the campaign, delivering on the ground activities including free parking, Christmas fairs and small business networking events plus much much more

Gwynedd Council was among those local authorities who had decided to support Small Business Saturday by suspending parking fees on the day and, of course, launching the Buy Local Gwynedd Scheme.

Buy Local Gwynedd had a stand at the Portmeirion Christmas Fair on both days - Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th December - and on this stand we showcased products made by local producers. These included:

- Bragdy Llew <http://www.facebook.com/bragdylleu> - quality Welsh beer from Dyffryn Nantlle
- Sioned Hywel <http://www.sionedhywel.co.uk> - personalised gifts
- Pwyth Pistyll <https://www.facebook.com/pwythpistyllffion/> - personalised gifts
- Cors y Gedol Pottery <http://www.crochendy-cors-y-gedol-pottery.com> - pottery
- Recipe Giftbook <http://recipegiftbook.com> - unique wedding gifts
- Crefftau Eryri Crafts <https://www.facebook.com/crefftaueryricrafts> - hand crafted pebble art box frames
- Mooshkin <http://www.mooshkin.co.uk> - hand painted glassware and greetings cards

At the launch, speeches were made by Councillor Mandy Williams-Davies, Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community at Gwynedd Council) and Ian Nellist from the Federation of Small Businesses.

The Portmeirion Christmas Fair, despite being battered by fierce winds and heavy rain, still managed to attract a lot of visitors: on the Saturday, over a thousand people braved the weather to attend the event, with even more attending on the Sunday when the weather was much better!

A fascinating and varied selection of products were available to buy at the event, from stallholders including:

- Na-Nog www.na-nog.co.uk - Welsh language CDs, DVDs, books and greetings cards
- Meinir Wyn www.meinirwyn.com - ceramic art, jewellery and cards
- Celtic Herbal Co www.celtic-herbal.co.uk - handmade soaps and skincare
- Fflur www.fflur.co.uk - Welsh art and handmade decorative items
- Peris & Corr www.perisandcorr.com - hand printed textiles and homewares
- Josie Russell www.josierussell.com - textile pictures from recycled materials
- Sara Lois www.saralois.com - silver/Welsh slate jewellery

Even though the weather could have been a little less dramatic, it was a fantastic weekend at an idyllic venue, and it was wonderful to see our local business community so well-supported both by Portmeirion and by local shoppers. A huge 'thank you' to everyone who came along and supported the launch of Buy Local Gwynedd - and a merry Christmas to all! We'll be back in the new year with more news and articles (don't forget to use the subscription form below, to subscribe to our newsletter) - see you in 2016!

Keeping it local: a shopping trip to Caernarfon

Originally published in February 2016

I have a confession... I don't shop locally half as much as I'd like to, and nowhere near as much as I ought to!

It's a laziness thing, you see. After years of working from home, I've slipped into bad habits. Talking to the pets and answering as them; working in my pyjamas; and the biggest sin of all, doing almost all of my shopping online. Buying online is not in itself so sinful; plenty of small businesses sell online. No, my confession is not so much about *how* I purchase - rather, *from whom*...

Yes, I'm one of those lazy shoppers who returns time after time to Amazon and Ebay, despite knowing that I should be doing more to support local businesses.

So I set myself a challenge. I pledged to go out of my way to go on a proper shopping trip once a month somewhere in Gwynedd. Have car, will travel - but first, note to self: remember to change out of pyjamas before setting off...

For my first trip I decided to go to Caernarfon, my nearest town. I'm being brave by leaving the safe cocoon of my home, so I don't want to jinx things by going too far, too soon. And as it was a Monday, it was market day; perfect, as I needed to stock up on fruit and veg (no, Tesco - you can beg as much as you like, but I shall ignore you).

Armed with an assortment of shopping bags, off I went.

As it was just before Christmas, parking was free - woohoo! I walked to Palace Street where I knew there were some excellent shops stocking exactly what I needed: a fantastic selection of books at Palas Print and some really beautiful Christmas tree decorations at Lotti and Wren, where I also admired the Niki Pilkington art prints and made a mental note to drop some hints at home...

I suddenly remembered that I needed some buttons so I popped into YLP Haberdashery, a couple of doors away. I'm used to buying such items on Amazon, where I usually become frustrated that a Marketplace seller is sending my goods from China and they won't arrive for 3-4 weeks. Why did I never consider shopping locally for these before? It was so enjoyable browsing physical items instead of photos, and the lady behind the counter was very friendly and helpful when I asked for advice. I will definitely go there again!

Ty Siocled next, to buy some beautiful chocolates for our Christmas feast. The sight (and smell!) of all that chocolate made me hungry, so I nipped into Caffi Maes for a spot of lunch. I have to say, they really do make wonderful sandwiches - the bread was beautifully soft and fresh, and the side order of onion rings was delicious! Refreshed, I remembered that I needed a couple of stocking fillers, so I popped next door to the Occasions gift shop, and then to Y Pantri Cymraeg for some delicious Merlyn cream liqueur (hic!)

Finally, I had a look around the market. Caernarfon's market is pretty small, but the choice, quality and prices on the butcher's and greengrocer's stalls really surprised me - in a good way! I was able to fill my shopping bags with all the meat, fruit and vegetables I needed, at close to supermarket prices (in some cases, cheaper) and at the same time bask in the glow of knowing my money was going to a local business owner rather than a faceless investor on the other side of the world. It felt good!

Was I able to get absolutely everything I needed by shopping locally? In all honesty, no. But will I be doing it again? You betcha! That couple of hours in Caernarfon really opened my eyes, and who knows - shopping locally might even become my new habit!

Keeping it local- a shopping trip to Pwllheli

Originally published in March 2016

Following on from last month's confession and my pledge to shop locally at least once a month, my next shopping trip was to Pwllheli.

It was the end of January and a special anniversary was looming, so my shopping list this time around included an anniversary gift and groceries and wine for our celebratory meal. I also had some money left over from the cash gift my mum had given me for Christmas, so a little treat just for me was high up on my list!

It was a Wednesday; market day in Pwllheli, I knew, and Pwllheli's market takes place on the 'maes' - the town square - which is the town's largest car park when it's not being used for a market. With this in mind, and not wanting to waste time driving around looking for a parking space, I decided to take the bus into town instead of driving.

After a short while on the bus, alternating between reading my book and admiring the view through the window, I reminded myself to take the bus more often. When you're driving you're so fixated on the road, looking out for potential dangers, that the scenery has a tendency to whizz past before you've had a chance to appreciate it. The scenery on this route (the A499) is pretty special and not something you'd want to miss. The purple hue of the mountains, turning to a reddish hint where the low winter sun hit their slopes, was mesmerising.

When I arrived at Pwllheli I decided to start at the market and make my way through the town from there.

There was a fantastic stall selling homewares - everything from bleach and scourers to mugs and airtight plastic containers. That was a stroke of luck, actually; hubby needed a new lunchbox and I found an excellent one at this stall - for only £2, too; what a bargain!

Spar next, to buy food for our special dinner. Now, I know you're going to protest that Spar is a national chain and therefore can't be considered 'shopping locally', but actually each Spar is an individual local business. As it happens, Spar in Pwllheli is widely recognised as a fantastic local business, thanks in part to the extensive range of locally-produced foods it stocks. I knew I wanted some Plas Farm coleslaw (it really is delicious - give it a try) and I knew that Spar in Pwllheli stocked it, so that was the first thing in my basket. They also have an excellent selection of fresh fruit and veg, so I stocked up on those too.

A few doors away was Pysgod Llyn, Pwllheli's celebrated fishmonger. I know they're famous for their excellent ready meals, but on this occasion I was shopping for fresh fish, so I had a good look around and after some cooking suggestions from Kathryn I bought some beautiful cod.

Wine next, and it was only a walk of a few metres to the off licence - Gwin Llyn - so I popped in and after a few minutes emerged with a delicious bottle of white.

Meal now sorted, it was now time to look for an anniversary gift, so I went to Tonnau to look at the artwork and choose something special. I chose a cheerful, colourful print with a nautical theme - ideal for my sea-obsessed husband!

Finally, I nipped into Oriel Pwlldefaid for a treat or two for myself. My eye was instantly drawn to some gorgeous earrings, so into the basket they went. And then I discovered their craft supplies section, and stocked up on lots of bits and pieces to replenish my dwindling stocks.

Before I knew it, it was time to get the bus home again. Laden with goodies I sunk into my seat for the return journey, already wondering where I should go for my next local shopping trip. Hmm, so many options! Where would you choose?

Keeping it local: a shopping trip to Porthmadog

Originally published in March 2016

After my recent 'shopping locally' trips to Caernarfon and Pwllheli, this month I decided to shop in Porthmadog - and this time round it was a family affair...

My mum and stepfather were visiting from London, and in truth we actually had several day trips that weekend which included looking around local shops, including some I've talked about here before. But Mum fancied a trip to Porthmadog on the Saturday, so we took them there with my daughter, son-in-law and two young grandsons for a look around the shops and a spot of lunch.

One of the first shops we visited was Vegonia, a health food shop on Porthmadog High Street. Usually, when I need healthy ingredients, supplements and natural toiletries I go to Dimensions in Upper Bangor. But we weren't going to have time for a trip there during my parents' visit, and we had run out of the gorgeous Suma geranium and rose soap that we're so fond of, and were close to the end of our bottle of hair conditioner (same brand, same fragrance) so when we spotted that Porthmadog had a health shop (a fact I'd managed to completely forget until we arrived) we went in and filled a basket with everything we needed.

My husband wanted a tea infuser so we looked around both branches of the Portmeirion shop, convinced that if anyone in Porthmadog would sell such a thing, it would be them. Sadly on this occasion we were wrong, but even so we really enjoyed looking at all the beautiful homewares and daydreaming about winning the lottery and buying absolutely everything! My daughter was particularly taken with the beautiful toys on sale - many of which were brightly painted wooden toys of the type she particularly likes for the boys.

My daughter wanted to browse her favourite Porthmadog shop, Genius, so I went in with her and admired the lovely gifts and hand crafted items on sale. I do a bit of crafting too, in my spare time, so I left one of my flyers with the girls behind the counter so that they could pass it to their boss, who wasn't in that day, to see if there was an opportunity for me to sell any of my items through Genius.

As it was just across the road, I took everyone into Kerfoots, the department store (the only independently-owned one in Wales, as it happens) and we admired the beautiful stained glass roof and browsed the many floors of quality goods for sale. I treated my grandson to a lovely hand puppet, as his birthday was coming up.

Hungry now, we decided to stop for lunch at Lily's Kitchen where we filled up on chips and tea - and very good they were, too! Afterwards, as we crossed over the road my grandson's eye was caught by a particular toy outside the 'bit of everything' shop on the corner of Chapel Street. It was a plastic aeroplane on the end of a 'walking stick', which when pushed along made a dinging noise while the propeller turned around. Little Jacob was really taken with it, so how could I resist buying it for him? We all thought it very cute that he insisted on pushing his new toy all the way back to the car, which was parked at the big car park behind Wilkinson's. That may not sound like a big deal, but for a two-year-old it's quite a walk!

When we got back home I explained to everyone about Buy Local Gwynedd and what it aims to achieve, and how they would appear in this article. Everyone was very impressed that our local council is so supportive of local businesses, and all agreed that shopping locally really makes sense if you want to help keep money in your local economy instead of it going into the pockets of overseas shareholders who have no interest in our area other than what can be earned from it. We talked about the fact that when you shop locally, you're helping to keep local people in work, who would in turn spend their money locally and ensure more jobs and other benefits for local people. All agreed it made sense to shop in this way as often as possible, and said they would try to do this now that they understood the benefits. Having gained a handful of new converts, my shopping trip this month was even more worth doing than usual!

Keeping it local – a shopping trip to Bala

Originally published in May 2016

When my husband announced that he had to drive to Bala for a meeting, I decided to join him. Not for the meeting, of course – but for a shopping trip to a town I hadn't visited in nearly 20 years...

But this trip would be different to my outings to Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Porthmadog – because this time, it was more about window shopping and getting ideas than it was about buying things. After all, when there's an audience waiting to hear about what it's like to shop in different locations around Gwynedd, without using chain stores, one needs to show a bit of dedication!

So off we drove to Bala. As it was only 8.45am when we arrived, most of the shops were closed when hubby went off to his meeting, so I asked him to leave me outside Jan's Cafe so that I could have a cuppa and a quick read while I waited for the shops to open. A cup of decaf and a home made Welshcake later and I felt much more awake (we'd left home at 7.30 – a pretty unsociable hour by anyone's standards!). The cafe had a lovely relaxed vibe, and felt very homely... and the Welshcake was absolutely delicious!

Suitably refreshed, I walked up and down the main street peering in shop windows, making notes and generally enjoying the prettiness of the town. The last time I visited Bala properly was in 1997 for the National Eisteddfod – my first ever visit to one, actually – while I was still living in London. I was surprised and delighted to see that Sospan Fach, a little tea room that I remember visiting during my visit 19 years ago, was still very much in business; how lovely to learn that this little business was still going strong after such a long time!

The High Street still seemed very familiar to me after such a very long time, and it was lovely to wander up and down the road, reminiscing about my previous visit.

One thing that struck me about Bala was that despite there being no grocery superstores in sight – just a smallish Co-Op and a Spar – the town is very well-served when it comes to places to buy fresh produce. I noticed two family butchers and a good old-fashioned greengrocer's shop – one of those things you don't seem to see on high streets very often these days. It was also great to see a proper sweet shop too – Cocoa – which displayed a mouth-watering selection of naughty-but-nice things to eat.

We're planning to completely change our kitchen soon, so during my trip to Bala I spent some time looking at kitchenware and decorative items that would work well in the new kitchen. I spotted some gorgeous kettles at Celfi Penllyn, as well as some cute egg cabinets (my in-laws have recently started keeping chickens, and hubby has become a bit of a snob about how to store freshly-laid eggs... seriously!) Siop Ria also had some cute pieces that would look good, so I took some photos to add to my Pinterest board along with the photos I'd taken through the windows of the other shops.

It's a shame we arrived so early, as I would have loved to explore these shops properly... but on the other hand, if the contents of the windows were anything to go by, it's probably for the best that they were closed, otherwise I'd be getting a telling-off from hubby for spending too much! Still, there will be other opportunities to go back to Bala and explore the shops properly – especially now that I know what they're selling, i.e. things I really want to buy! Or perhaps I'll just add Bala to the "days out" list for the next visit from my parents... that's one way to guarantee I'll get to visit the town again!

From farm to fork: the dawn of a Welsh food revolution?

An interview with Gareth Wyn Jones, part 1 of 3

Originally published in June 2016

Gareth Wyn Jones is a hill farmer in Llanfairfechan. His family have been farming lamb and beef in the Carneddau range for hundreds of years, and for at least three and a half centuries, since records on such things began, his family has helped to manage the Carneddau wild ponies.

In September 2015 Gareth was the subject of a three-part mini-series on BBC Wales, *The Farmer and the Food Chain*, which documented his efforts to reignite shoppers' passion for shopping locally. During the series Gareth opened a pop-up shop in Bangor, selling locally produced foods. The series saw him meeting other producers from within a 40-mile radius of his own farm, including Llŷn fisherman Siôn Williams, vegetable farmer Chris Jones and pork producer Ella Roberts. Gareth examined the power of the supermarkets, discovering some uncomfortable statistics as he followed our food from farm to fork. And in the final episode he worked with schools and confronted the Welsh government with his concerns about the Welsh food industry.

"Feedback from the documentary was amazing," Gareth tells me over the phone, his voice quite rightly exuding pride in all he's achieved with the TV series, "and it was an unbelievable experience to discover how many local producers there are in the area."

Gareth is extremely knowledgeable and passionate about his subject. Quite contagiously so, in fact. And that's reasonable enough, given that it's his livelihood that's at stake. I furiously scribble down notes, filling two A4 sheets with my tiny handwriting in the half an hour that we're on the phone. By the end of the conversation I'm almost as fired up and desperate to make a positive change as Gareth is.

"There's not enough communication [between producers]," Gareth says when I ask him what's going wrong with the Welsh food industry. "We need to communicate better as an industry. Social media is helpful [*it's worth noting that Gareth is [very active on Twitter](#), with over 12,500 followers*]. Let's get people sourcing and eating locally. It helps keep our young people in the area - you know, *laith Gwaith* and all that [*'the language of work', a scheme to promote the speaking of Welsh in the workplace which in turn protects the future of the language*]. Restaurants and hotels need to source locally and tell the story of the farm, the producers: *what it is you're supporting* by buying that meal. Farming as an industry is very good at producing, but very poor at selling!"

The subject of what's wrong with the food industry in Wales – indeed, in the UK as a whole – is a complex one. Farmers not working together, failing to communicate and really sell the benefits of their industry is just a small part of the jigsaw puzzle.

For one thing, Gareth would like to see more choice for consumers when it comes to shopping locally – and that's a responsibility of not just the farmers and producers but also businesses that can offer a selling space for the food that's produced. "Farmers need to come together and do more to create settings where all food producers can sell together," he says. "Like 'food hubs' at places where people gather – for example, pubs. You can order from everyone, for example veg, meat... the food hub would hand out leaflets about the producers, so customers can really follow the story of the food and the people producing it. You'd place your order, maybe have a pint while you're there (which does the landlord a favour too) and then you'd come back on delivery day to collect your order."

I like the sound of this. In the busy modern world, shoppers tend to value convenience very highly; many of us find shopping trips to be rather an ordeal, and more often than not opt to have supermarket deliveries - or just visit the nearest supermarket - in order to avoid excessive travel. This is particularly the case in rural communities, where independent shops selling locally produced goods can be spaced fairly widely apart. I know from experience of my own shopping trips, trying to squeeze in the Hooton's concession at Fron Goch Garden Centre for meat and vegetables, Pysgod Llŷn in Pwllheli for fish and seafood, Glasfryn's

farm shop for frozen fruit and Y Pantri Cymraeg in Caernarfon for jams, sauces and pickles - all in the space of a couple of hours - that it can be challenging.

And if your nearest independent shops don't have what you're looking for that day, well... let's just hope there's a food and craft fair happening soon. A local food hub would be quite a godsend in my local community, of this I'm sure.

In the second part of our interview with Gareth, he talks about the decline of the family meal as an 'event', and the need to educate children about where our food comes from. Follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) to find out when part two has been published.

Callout box: the UK food industry in numbers

- The agri-food sector contributed £109 billion, or 7.3% to national Gross Value Added in 2014
- 54% of food consumed in the UK is produced in the UK.
- 3.9m people were employed in the agri-food sector in 2015 - 14% of national employment.
- £198bn - total consumer expenditure on food, drink and catering in 2014. On average, around 11% of all household spending is on food.
- The average UK household spend on food that could have been eaten but is thrown away is around £470 a year
- 15 million tonnes of food and drink was wasted in the food chain in 2013 in the UK.
- The retail price of avoidable food and drink waste from UK homes was around £9 per household per week in 2012, or 14% of the £66 spent on average each week on household food. The cost to the UK of avoidable food and drink waste in 2012 was £12.5 billion.
- UK household purchases of fruit and vegetables were 1.8% lower in 2014 than in 2013, a reduction of 11.4% since their peak in 2006. Defra estimates that 22% of edible fruit and vegetables are wasted.
- In 2013 6.8% of adults and 6.7% of children included no fruit or vegetables in their diet.

Source: UK Government, [The Food Statistics Pocket Book 2015](#), (PDF)

From farm to fork: get the food chain on the school curriculum!

An interview with Gareth Wyn Jones, part 2 of 3

Originally published in June 2016

Hill farmer [Gareth Wyn Jones](#) knows a thing or two about shopping locally. He ought to; after all, he was the subject of a three-part BBC Wales series about the Welsh food industry, “The Farmer and the Food Chain”, which aired in September 2015.

In the first part of our interview Gareth explained how farmers and other producers could communicate better and create ‘food hubs’ where they could sell their produce to customers who might otherwise find it difficult to source locally produced food. Gareth’s idea is certainly very interesting: imagine being able to order your meat, fish, fruit and veg at the local pub on Monday, and popping in on Tuesday to collect it all. Could this be the future of shopping locally?

We talked about my options for shopping locally – a handful of very small shops scattered around a fairly wide area, which, despite selling fantastic quality food, are spaced too far apart to be a viable shopping option for all consumers.

Shops selling local produce exist, then, but shopping at them is still not really what you’d term ‘convenient’; for some, it still means going out of your way to visit half a dozen different shops, and resorting to the likes of Tesco for all the things that aren’t produced or sold locally. I like Gareth’s idea of a food hub very much; but that doesn’t stop my mind wandering towards daydreams of winning the Euromillions and opening a huge indoor market where producers, farmers and crafters can come together in a sort of year-round food and crafts fair so that there’s very little need for consumers to visit supermarkets and discounters at all, saving such visits for dull-but-necessary purchases like dishwasher tablets and pet food. I’m thinking of Gareth’s pop-up shop, but on a much larger and more permanent scale.

“We need to shop and eat seasonally again, like we used to,” says Gareth, interrupting my reverie with his sage observations on Britain’s shopping habits (there are many more of these to come; he’s clearly done his research). “Too much is sourced abroad, year-round, and we’ve become a throwaway society; food is too cheap.”

The UK’s lowest earners might be inclined to disagree, I suggest. Gareth isn’t so sure. “People on low incomes... I don’t know, broadband and Sky come before food – there are kids with better phones than me but low earners complain about the cost of food!” I tell Gareth about Jack Monroe, AKA “A Girl Called Jack”, who rose to prominence a few years ago by producing a blog about [feeding a family on a virtually non-existent budget](#) [warming – there is some quite colourful language on Jack’s blog, so please don’t click the link if you’re offended by swearing]. This is news to Gareth, and he tells me he’ll check out Jack’s website. Even so, he says, “we need to be less of a throwaway society. We need to go out and buy fresh fruit and veg, cook our own meals, and buy less meat but better quality so that it lasts 3-4 meals instead of just one.” I tell Gareth that that’s how we tend to do things in our house: have a big cooking spree once every couple of weeks and fill our 6ft-tall freezer with home cooked meals in convenient ready-to-reheat portions. “Exactly!” he says. “You can shop on a budget and still eat healthily. All these ads on telly for what is basically cr*p food – you could be making it yourself!”

Gareth is just as passionate about food as he is about the industry which produces it. Clearly a man who enjoys good, wholesome, home-cooked meals, Gareth hits the nail on the head when he talks about the typical Brit’s attitude to shopping, cooking and eating. “Food has become a chore,” he laments. “It should be a pleasure to cook food and enjoy it with the family. Sunday lunch is special in our house; it’s a family meal, where we eat meat I’ve raised, veg I’ve grown – we spend an hour and a half around the table chatting and eating.” I can imagine him shaking his head in dismay as he tells me that by eschewing meals around the table in favour of TV dinners, “families are missing out”.

Children are key, Gareth reckons, when it comes to securing the future of Wales’ food industry. “There’s no education for kids about where food comes from,” he says. “Kids need

to go on farms and understand where their food comes from. We could save the government millions by educating – Wales could be at the forefront of a farming and food revolution! We're feeding the next generation – educate that generation about how and what to eat, how supermarkets work, how farmers are squashed [by supermarkets]. How you'll have a healthier life by changing your eating and shopping habits, and how this will save millions for the government in health costs. It's an investment in the next generation, in every sense. Get it on the school curriculum! Get schoolkids drinking milk again – milk is *good* for you!"

In the third and final part of our interview with Gareth, he reveals some uncomfortable statistics about the UK food industry and suggests that the government could do more to help. Follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) to find out when part three has been published.

Callout box: food price and expenditure

Food prices rose 11.5% in real terms between 2007 and their peak in June 2012 as measured by the Consumer Price Index, following a long period in which they had fallen. Gradual price reductions since 2013 have reduced that real terms increase to 8.0% compared to 2007.

In the past 12 months food price inflation has fallen in real terms by 1.7%.

A rise in food prices is more difficult for low income households to cope with because those on low incomes spend a greater proportion of their income on food - a rise in food prices has a disproportionately large impact on money available to spend elsewhere.

The relative affordability of food can be measured by the share of the household budget that goes on food. Low income households are of particular concern as they tend to have a greater percentage of spend going on food.

Food is exerting greater pressure on household budgets since 2007 when food prices started to rise in real terms.

Averaged over all households 11.1% of spend went on food in 2014, 0.6 percentage points above the 2007 level.

For households in the lowest 20% by equivalised income 16.4% of spend went on household food, 0.2 percentage points above 2007.

In 2013, the average UK household bought 3.9 portions of 'five-a-day' foods, per person, per day. In lower income households, only 3 portions are bought. In Wales, from 2012-2014, the average was 3.5 portions per person per day, and purchases of fruit were lower in Wales than anywhere else in the UK.

Source: UK Government, [The Food Statistics Pocket Book 2015](#),

From farm to fork: let's make food sexy again!

An interview with Gareth Wyn Jones, part 3 of 3

Originally published in June 2016

Llanfairfechan hill farmer [Gareth Wyn Jones](#) is a passionate and knowledgeable spokesman for the Welsh food industry. In part one [\[link\]](#) of our interview he described how producers are great at producing fantastic food, but they need to work closer together to really sell it. In part two [\[link\]](#) he talked about educating children from an early age so that they understand our food's journey from farm to fork, and lamented the decline of the tradition of making the family meal around the table a 'special event'.

In this third and final instalment, Gareth talks about the barriers facing Welsh farmers from one obvious source – the supermarkets – and one that you'd expect to be more supportive; namely, the government.

I pressed Gareth about a subject we're all aware of to some degree: the fact that supermarkets are seen to 'squeeze' producers in order to get the lowest possible prices which they claim to be passing on to their customers. I get quite irritated about this subject, I tell him; yes, there is doubtless some degree of need to respond to market forces such as the amount a consumer is prepared to pay for a price of milk; it's part and parcel of operating in a competitive environment. But to my cynical mind it's probably more about getting the best return on investment for shareholders. That's what really gets my goat, I tell him: more often than not, shareholders are already extremely well-off and besides which they often live abroad; certainly they're keeping more of their money overseas than they're putting back into the UK's economy, whether that's by spending it in other countries or simply by failing to pay tax in the UK on income they've made here.

Just how bad is that 'squeezing', though?

"I'm lucky," Gareth admits, "because I'm not a dairy farmer and so this doesn't affect me as badly as it could. But let's take a pint of milk as an example: if you spend 40p on a pint of milk in a supermarket, only about 17p goes to the farmer. Supermarkets say they're charging what consumers will pay, but in my experience people will actually pay more if the animal welfare is good and local businesses will benefit." Watching the first episode of *The Farmer and the Food Chain* shortly after speaking to Gareth, I note that he's quite correct about this; when he opened his pop-up shop in Bangor for the day, it was buzzing with activity, local producers sold way more produce than they'd expected (vegetable farmer Chris Jones seemed stunned when he announced that he'd picked up 40 new weekly veg box customers), and customers admitted that they were pleasantly surprised at the prices they'd paid for good quality locally-produced food products. They'd expected prices to be much higher.

Gareth uses some colourful language, for which he apologises profusely, when he describes the effects of the supermarkets' squeeze tactics: "The majority of people are being scr*wed," he spits. "[The supermarkets] are total b*****ds. We're a minor cog... 60% of supermarket food is imported, and 30% of it is wasted."

It does seem quite crazy when you look at how the importing and exporting of food in Britain pans out. In fisherman Siôn Williams' segment in the first episode of the documentary, the narrator passes on some frankly baffling statistics: namely that, Wales not being much of a shellfish-eating nation, 80% of the catch landed here is exported. Conversely, of the seafood that we *do* eat, a massive 70% is imported. Only about a quarter of Siôn's catch of lobsters and crabs will stay in Wales; the rest of it ends up on dinner plates in mainland Europe and as far afield as China. It's all very frustrating.

Governments could be doing more too, though, according to Gareth. "The government is working with supermarkets to press for big growth," he says. Supermarkets want to do business with bigger producers, he tells me, but "small family farms are best," he says, before telling me that 86% of food in the world comes from family farms.

Gareth explains that EU legislation stipulates that anyone in the EU may tender for jobs within the British and Welsh governments, and that if Welsh companies do win those tenders there's no insistence that it's specifically Welsh produce that is used. "We procure £74m of food in Wales for schools, hospitals and so on," he tells me. "£45m is *procured* through Welsh companies, but unfortunately [the procurement rules] don't stipulate that food must be *locally-produced* where possible, even if it costs extra."

Such is Gareth's passion and enthusiasm, I could quite happily have spoken to him all day. The more we speak, the more I want to open a truly local supermarket or regular farmer's market so that producers and consumers can better support each other. With no middleman – in my daydream the profits are for the producers, not the owner of the building they're selling in – producers can afford to charge a little less, and consumers can afford to buy a little more. What a great way to keep money in the local economy!

The documentary's narrator informs me as I watch the first episode that "it's estimated that every £10 spent in a local shop is actually worth £25 to the local economy, as the money stays in the community and supports other businesses," while "£1 spent in a supermarket is estimated to be worth half that spent in a local shop." With over £17bn a year spent on food and drink in Wales, and almost all of us doing our weekly shop in a supermarket, something has to give... but how do we kick-start that revolution Gareth is so keen to press on with?

I can hear the smile in Gareth's voice as he tells me the answer: "Let's tell our story better... let's make food sexy again!"

I couldn't agree more.

Callout box: retailer market share and food waste

The combined market share of food and non-alcoholic drinks of the largest four food and drink retailers was 58% in 2013, down from 62% in 2012. Tesco commanded the largest market share at 22%, a decrease of 2 percentage points on 2012. The three largest discounters (Aldi, Iceland and Lidl) had a combined market share of 9.9%, up from 7.9% in 2012. Internet food shopping, which includes the largest supermarkets, increased by 1 percentage point on 2012, to 5.4% of sales of food and non-alcoholic drinks.

15 million tonnes of food and drink was wasted in the food chain in 2013 in the UK. Around 41 mt of food are purchased in the UK annually (mainly for use in the home), meaning that the quantity wasted in the supply chain is equivalent to about one third of the food purchased.

The highest proportion of food and drink waste in the food chain was wasted in households, with 7 million tonnes being thrown away in the UK in 2012, or just under half of the 15 mt.

Of the 7 mt of household food and drink waste, 4.2 mt was avoidable, 1.2 mt was possibly avoidable and 1.6 mt was unavoidable.

Manufacturing contributed the second largest proportion of waste, at 26% (3.9 mt), followed by hospitality with 6% (0.92 mt). Grocery retail and wholesale together only wasted 2.9% (0.4 mt).

Source: UK Government, [*The Food Statistics Pocket Book 2015*](#),

Keeping it local: a trip to the Criccieth Food Slam

Originally published in June 2016

In this month's 'keeping it local' article, I do things slightly differently... because I'm not just buying, I'm also selling!

Now that I'm getting into the swing of shopping locally more often and doing my bit to support local businesses by adjusting my shopping habits, it's interesting to see how things are from the other side of the fence – that is, as someone that's selling as well as buying.

The perfect opportunity arose for me when I was lucky enough to get a stall in the crafters' tent at the Criccieth Food Slam.

I'd been to the Menai Bridge Food Slam a couple of weeks previously (these are organised by the Anglesey Food Group – you can find out more about them at the Best of Anglesey website) and had a really good time. The atmosphere was fantastic; as well as lots of delicious food and several craft stalls, there was live music and children's entertainment too. It was an evening event and it was a beautiful warm, sunny evening, and everyone was milling around with smiles on their faces, short sleeves and sunglasses, drinking their favourite tippie and enjoying the great food and music.

When I managed to secure a spot as a seller at Criccieth, I hadn't realised that the event would be much bigger than Menai Bridge. It was held on the Esplanade, a huge grassy area on Criccieth's long seafront, and there were dozens of amazing stalls selling, among other things, local mussels, local ice cream (I had the blueberry flavour – yum yum!), pizzas, Welsh alcoholic drinks and even haloumi wraps (I had one for lunch and it was exquisite!)

I arrived at 9.30am, knowing that it would be a long day (the event was due to finish at 10pm). I'm very glad I packed a folding chair and a huge bottle of water, because it would be a long time to be standing on my feet.

What I didn't know, however, was just how busy the day would be!

Almost from the off – the gate opened at midday – it was jam packed with people. And it was only a very short amount of time before I started selling! I was so delighted to be able to sell so many of my products; the glass solar lanterns were very popular that day, but I also sold several other painted glass pieces as well as several pieces of jewellery and a good few Welsh language greetings cards. The little organza bags stuffed with dried lavender from my garden also went down well.

I spoke to my fellow stallholders at various points throughout the day and discovered that most of them had also had a very successful day. The man next to me, selling beautiful hand-crafted slate jewellery ("it's not jewellery, it's wearable art!" he insisted) seemed to do exceptionally well, with an American customer buying several pieces as gifts for friends back home.

The entertainment during the day was very good too, and the highlight for me was singing along with Meic Stevens to 'Y Brawd Houdini' towards the end of his set. It's an old favourite and it was great to hear it as the sun went down in this very beautiful location at the end of a really successful day of selling.

Having seen the effects of buying locally from the perspective of a seller, I'm more convinced than ever that buying locally – just an item at a time, or a fiver a week – can really make a difference. And visiting these events to show your face, enjoy the sunshine and the scenery (or brave the rain, as the case may be) and let local businesses know they have your support, even if you only spend a pound or two, really is a great service to your local community.

So if you're in Gwynedd this summer and there's a craft fair, food fair or carnival taking place near you, please do go along. You'll have fun, you'll support your local economy, and you may even pick up a bargain or two!

Keeping it local – a shopping trip to Bangor

Originally published in July 2016

In our latest 'keeping it local' article, we take advantage of a visit from relatives and have a wander around the market at Bangor.

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It was the end of June, and my parents were coming up from Essex for a nice long weekend visit. As usual, they came on the Thursday and weren't leaving until Monday, so we had three full days of activities planned.

Usually when my parents visit, we have at least one day of walking around one of the local town centres (you may recall that we took them to Porthmadog on a previous visit, and we almost always go to Caernarfon too).

This time, I wanted to take them to Bangor on the Friday, because that's market day and it would be a bit of a change from visiting on a Saturday and mostly shopping in the larger stores.

Don't get me wrong – as a family, oddly we all enjoy shopping at Debenhams! But this time I wanted the emphasis to be more on shopping locally, so I explained my motives (that is, writing up our 'buy local' experiences for the blog) and everyone was happy to comply, so off we went.

Thankfully, it was a gorgeous day. Mum usually brings several thick layers of clothing with her when she visits, as the weather can usually be relied upon to be... erm... unreliable! But as you can see from my photos, on this occasion the sun was out and we were all able to wear short sleeves for a change. See, mum – we do get nice weather sometimes!

It takes a while to get two carloads of people organised and out of the house (my daughter, son in law and grandchildren came out too), so it was lunchtime when we arrived at Bangor. Our first stop – because my husband is quite famously unable to do anything at all if he doesn't have his lunch at precisely midday – was lunch. But where to eat?

Normally we'd go somewhere big and cheap, like Wetherspoons. But on this occasion I wanted everyone to try out one of my favourite Bangor eateries, namely the Kyffin Cafe. This is Bangor's only vegetarian cafe, which is perfect for me as I don't eat meat (and a bit of an education for everyone else in our group, because they all do). Kyffin's serve the best salads I've ever tasted, and they make beautiful soups, flans and other vegetarian and vegan delights. The atmosphere is lovely too – very laid-back and comfortable – and it's a really fascinating place to be, thanks to the wonderful selection of speciality tea leaves and coffee beans that you can take home with you for a really special brew.

With husband's tummy full, he was now able to summon up enough strength to walk around the city centre, so off we went to check out the market.

I needed to stock up on fruit and veg, so the greengrocer's stall was my first port of call. What I love most about buying fruit and veg from a market, compared to a supermarket, is the 'honesty' of the produce. None of this polished, uniformly-shaped malarkey you'd find at the supermarket; here, the produce is wonky and dirty, just as it should be! There's a certain pleasure to be had in scrubbing muddy carrots, believe it or not! Buying fruit and veg from a market stall takes me back to my 1970s London childhood, when mum would buy almost everything locally. We had a Tesco near us, but only used it for buying non-perishables. Meat always came from Barnard's the Butcher on Plender Street, and veg from the stall opposite. Ah, the nostalgia!

Exploring the market further, my daughter couldn't resist a necklace from a little stall selling unusual jewellery. She told me it's one of her favourite places to buy little treats for herself, so it looks like the shopping locally bug is getting to us all!

Some bedding plants for the garden next; there's a good stall at Bangor market for buying plants, so I was glad to be able to give them my business that day. Having said that, I do actually live halfway between two excellent garden centres (Tyddyn Sachau in one direction and Fron Goch in the other) so I'm rather spoilt for choice locally when it comes to buying for the home and garden!

Our visit to Bangor that day wasn't a very long one; only a couple of hours, really. So there wasn't much time to look around the big shops as we had other plans. But that is very much a good thing! It made a great change to see more of what the local small businesses can offer, and I think my parents were pretty impressed.

But even so, as a special treat we let them have a quick look round Debenhams before we left Bangor. Compromise is a wonderful thing, isn't it?!

Keeping it local: shopping in Harlech

Originally published in August 2016

This month's mission to spend money in the local community takes our roving reporter to Harlech...

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One of the things I've learned during my time writing for Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd is that what's great about buying locally – whether you're a consumer or a business – is that every pound you spend locally makes a difference.

Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd has calculated that if every adult in Gwynedd were to change their shopping habits ever so slightly, by spending just £5 a week at a local business instead of with the multinationals, it would be worth an additional £26m a year to our local economy.

One tiny change like that can have such a huge impact, without making a huge impact on the way you shop. Nobody's suggesting that you completely stop using large superstores and start shopping exclusively at local shops, because realistically that's going to be difficult for most people.

And so it was with this in mind that my next 'shopping locally' trip was to the tiny town of Harlech.

I knew it wouldn't be possible to do a full shopping trip there, because there are not that many shops in the town. But I knew that I could go there for a look around and come back with a fiver's worth of something or another, and combine a pleasant morning out with doing something positive for the local economy.

I'd never actually been to Harlech before – not properly, anyway; I'd been to the theatre there a couple of times but had never been into the town centre. My research (hello, Google Street View) suggested the high street might not be as bustling as those of Caernarfon or Pwllhelli, my usual haunts, but that the town's shops looked pretty interesting nevertheless.

For a change, we decided to take the dog with us. We don't usually take him shopping as he gets a bit spooked by traffic and isn't used to being around crowds. But on this occasion we thought a small, quiet town like Harlech would be ideal for introducing him to the notion of taking walks around groups of people, traffic, and other dogs.

As it turned out, the dog received a present for being a good boy – a giant balloon 'football' that I saw him coveting outside the corner shop. So it's thanks to our pooch that this particular shop was £3.50 better off that day!

There are a couple of shops in Harlech that sell pre-loved items (that's a fancy way of saying second-hand shops!) and if I hadn't had the dog and the husband with me – both of whom have low boredom thresholds – I would happily have spent half an hour in each, browsing through those items that their original owners had deemed 'junk' but which new owners might consider 'treasure'. But alas – I was under strict instructions to keep moving, so a longing glance through the windows was about as much as I could get away with. A shame, because these shops looked like real Aladdin's caves and I would have loved to explore properly.

Walking further up the high street there's a little courtyard with shops around its perimeter. Mostly these sold high quality goods for the home (such as textiles, lighting and 'just gorgeous things, daaahling' as the Ab Fab ladies might say). Had there been more money in my purse that day, these shops would definitely have felt the benefit! There was also a gorgeous looking cafe-cum-delicatessen which, had there been more time and less dog, I would have loved to spend some time in.

Another shop I really enjoyed – and I was allowed to actually look around it properly, this time – was the little pottery-slash-gallery in what appeared to be a really ancient stone

building. This was on several levels and shoppers could even have a poke around the workshop, which was really cool. I've made a mental note of this place, as well as the interior design shops in the courtyard, as next time I'm shopping for a revamped room or an extra-special gift these shops will be at the top of my list.

All too soon it was time to turn back and head for home. But then I spotted the old-fashioned sweetshop that sold sweets by the weight, just as they did when I was a child in the 70s. At last, an opportunity to treat myself – and my long-suffering husband – to something nice. I came out with a 100g bag of sweets for me, and another for hubby, who seemed happy to have been rewarded for his efforts.

So, all three of us had a lovely morning out in the sunshine, and Harlech's economy was swelled by a grand total of £5.70! It's hardly a princely sum, but – and perhaps it's cheeky to steal a slogan from a supermarket after trying to persuade my readers to shop there less often – every little helps!

Keeping it local – a shopping trip in Dolgellau

Originally published in September 2016

In the latest local shopping assignment, we send our roving reporter on a shopping trip to Dolgellau.

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Dolgellau is one of those places which, having written about it from afar on behalf of clients with travel blogs, I'd longed to visit for many years. But not being the most confident of drivers and living an hour and a half away from this ancient market town, getting there had long been a challenge.

This weekend my luck was in. We were off to spend a night with friends who live in Machynlleth, so I asked the ~~chauffeur~~ husband if we could take a little detour on the way so that I could take a look around Dolgellau's shops. The answer was yes, but I had to be quick as he was in a rush to get to Mach. Ugh – quick shopping trips are the worst sort, if you're visiting a place you've never been to before and want to explore; but what else could I do? So I only spent 45 minutes in Dolgellau when I could so easily have stayed for two or three hours!

I'd barely walked from the car park to the town when I made my first stop. I spotted a really interesting-looking shop called Medi, one of those lovely little shops that I'm so fond of which sells 'just gorgeous things, daahling' as Patsy Stone might say. Stuffed to the rafters with absolutely beautiful handmade gifts and cards, Medi is exactly the sort of shop that I can easily lose myself in. But I was painfully conscious of the boys (the hubby and the dog) patiently waiting for me at the car park, so my browsing was much more hurried than I would have liked. Still, I managed to pick up not one but two birthday presents for my sister, so I was very happy about that. And I had a lovely long chat with the owner, which cut my remaining time in the town down quite significantly – oh well!

I left Medi reluctantly and carried on through Dolgellau's beautiful old streets, admiring the gorgeous listed buildings and wishing I had more time. I stopped to take the occasional photograph – as much for my own future reference as for this article – but otherwise I was on a bit of a mission, as I knew there was one shop I absolutely must visit before my time was up.

One thing I knew from my research on the shops of Dolgellau – and something I'd spotted on the one or two occasions over the years when I'd been a passenger in a car passing through – was that Dolgellau has a lovely little craft shop. As you may remember from some of my previous posts, when I'm not writing I'm crafting, and so craft shops are my very favourite places to shop.

Dolgellau's craft shop is called LouLouPurple, and although it's small I was rather miraculously able to buy *exactly* what I needed. And considering what I needed were rubber stamps saying "Penblwydd Hapus" and "Nadolig Llawn", and that the shop's owner, Louise, had to sort through stock to find them for me (they weren't out on display yet) it's even more miraculous. But most miraculous of all was that, had I bought them on Amazon (something I had been coming to the conclusion that I would be forced to do) they would actually have cost me twice as much. This is one of those occasions where shopping locally beats the online giants hands down, and as I've learned throughout this journey, massive websites like Amazon and Ebay aren't always the cheapest option.

All too soon it was time to go back to the car. My 'goodwill account' was running low on funds and I knew I'd get a frosty reception if I didn't get my skates on. Reluctantly (and with a good deal of under-my-breath grumbling) I hurried past the interesting-looking shops and cafes to the waiting boys and we continued on our journey to Machynlleth. But I made myself a promise: I will definitely go back to Dolgellau one day soon, minus the impatient companions, and explore the place properly – perhaps on a market day, since Dolgellau is still very much a market town. Considering how lovely Dolgellau is – not to mention its even lovelier shops – it's a day out I know I will enjoy a good deal.

Gwynedd business successes: South Caernarfon Creameries

Originally published in October 2016

One of Gwynedd's more interesting businesses, South Caernarfon Creameries is a farmer-owned cooperative which supplies dairy products to other local businesses and direct to the public.

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In 1938, a small group of local farmers decided to set up their own milk processing venture so that they could get a higher price for their milk (and if you've been following our blog, you'll know from our interviews with farmer Gareth Wyn Jones that getting fair prices for produce is still an issue today). Led by John Owen Roberts, the cooperative – at that time standing at 63 members - had whittled down the list of locations for the new venture to two potential properties: one in Pemprys, near Pentreuchaf, and the other in Chwillog. They decided on the latter, and South Caernarfon Creameries (SCC) has been operating there ever since.

Built on the site of an old woollen mill, SCC's premises soon became home to the country's first ever pasteuriser. Even as long ago as the 1930s SCC recognised the need to employ the latest technology to give its members a fighting chance; and a fighting chance was very much needed in those early days, given the resistance put up by some local farmers who were already selling direct to the public and didn't fancy seeing their livelihoods threatened. Besides, they said – there have been other attempts at forming cooperatives in the past, and these have failed; what's to stop the same thing happening again?

Thankfully, the cooperative thrived and grew, and in the first year John Owen Roberts realised he was onto something: with 63 farms on board, the profit that year was a massive £1,997 – the equivalent of almost £94,000 in 2016.

By 1942 milk was being bottled and sold locally. During the Second World War, milk from SCC was being packed onto trains for distribution in the north west of England. After the war the government realised just how much of a threat starvation had been to the British population during the wartime years, and made great efforts to support and encourage agricultural production by helping farmers to improve land, livestock and crops. Thanks to these efforts, by 1954 SCC's membership had swelled to 1,200.

In the late 1950s cheese production began at the cooperative, due to milk production reaching a record high which had led to a surplus. In 1959 the 'Caws Llŷn' brand began production, a popular brand still recognised locally today. Today, with 7,500 tonnes of cheese being produced on site each year, SCC's cheese portfolio extends to an impressive range of cheeses including Monterey Jack, Double Gloucester, Red Leicester and Welsh Caerphilly. The cooperative's Cavern Aged Cheddar is matured underground in slate caverns, and is one of SCC's most popular products. But perhaps the most unusual and impressive fact about SCC's cheese is that in the early 1970s the cooperative was producing Feta and exporting it to Greece!

Today, South Caernarfon Creameries supply to supermarkets and wholesalers all over Wales and England, and as far afield as Malta and the United Arab Emirates. The cooperative also sells its Dragon brand products – you're sure to have seen their milk, butter and cheese in local shops – direct to the public at shows and produce fairs.

Since its inception, SCC's mission has been to add value to its members' milk by manufacturing high quality dairy products for sale at home and abroad. Members aren't just 'suppliers' – they're also shareholders, meaning they get a say in how the cooperative is run. SCC has won a number of awards and has continued to invest in technology that helps its products really stand out, such as a £350,000 investment in a traditional butter churn – and SCC's uniqueness is even more noticeable thanks to the cooperative's policy of ensuring all packaging is bilingual.

Despite the cooperative's numerous and impressive successes, it can still be a risky business. The biggest challenge facing SCC is the fact that milk prices are volatile and can range dramatically in a relatively short time period, and there's the added challenge of Cheddar being a commodity market and very competitive.

Even so, South Caernarfon Creameries has big plans for the future, which from where we're sitting looks extremely bright. They've just completed an £8.6m new dairy facility on the Chwilog site and are in the process of upgrading their packaging facility to include more capacity and the ability to produce pre-packed grated and sliced cheeses. From December 2016 SCC will be supplying Sainsbury's for the supermarket's Basics range, and the cooperative has a new contract with Lidl to supply an additional three items in their stores.

South Caernarfon Creameries tell us that they aspire to "continue to grow [their] retailer and export business and develop new products to suit today's market". If this very determined, innovative and hard-working organisation's history is anything to go by, we have every reason to believe they'll succeed.

Social Saturday 2016: Gwynedd social enterprises take part

Originally posted in October 2016

Social Saturday is an annual event which encourages people to buy from social enterprises. This year, four major Gwynedd social enterprises are getting involved.

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Antur Waunfawr's "Warws Werdd" shop, GISDA, Menter Fachwen and Age Cymru Gwynedd a Môn are among Gwynedd's social enterprises who will be celebrating Social Saturday 2016.

Social Saturday takes place on 15 October 2016 and comprises UK-wide activities and events which celebrate social enterprises and help to raise awareness of this trading format and what it aims to achieve.

Social enterprises are businesses which reinvest their profits in projects that are for the common good. These can include environmental causes and regeneration of local communities.

There are over 70,000 social enterprises in the United Kingdom. They operate in all sorts of industries and sell all sorts of products and services. Interestingly, it has been said that social enterprises are more successful than SMEs (small to medium enterprises) in a number of areas including diversity and paying the Living Wage.

Social Saturday aims to raise awareness of the work done by social enterprises, to make sure the public know about them and the products and services they sell – and the good causes they support, too. You can get involved in a number of ways – for example, by choosing to buy gifts from a shop that's run as a social enterprise, or have lunch in a social enterprise eatery.

Gwynedd's social enterprises will celebrate Social Saturday in different ways, for example by offering discounts or holding special events. Keep an eye on the Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd Facebook page and Twitter feed to find out more, as we'll be sharing their news with our followers every day in the run-up to Social Saturday.

If you'd like to know more about Social Saturday, who's behind it, what happened at last year's Social Saturday and what to expect this year, please visit <http://www.socialsaturday.org.uk/>.

Gwynedd business successes: GreenWood Forest Park

Originally published in October 2016

In 1993 Andrea and Stephen Bristow bought a 17-acre plot of ex-forestry land in Snowdonia with a vague plan to use it to educate children about trees, in a fun way. Today, that plot is 10 acres bigger and has become one of the UK's top family attractions.

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Having worked for many years on environmental projects in Africa, Andrea and Stephen Bristow decided in 1991 that they'd like to relocate to Snowdonia, where their children had been born and where Stephen had been a student at Bangor University in the 1980s. Both extremely passionate about forestry and ecology, they had the idea that they could use their knowledge and experience to educate children in a fun way about how important trees are.

Initially, they thought that this might take the form of an 'Africa Centre'. They spent two and a half years living in North Wales and working on ideas, but in the end it was a friend of theirs, who at that time owned Anglesey Sea Zoo, that changed their minds.

"The response was 'hmmm...'" Andrea laughs when she tells me about the lukewarm reaction. "So we thought, 'what do we know about? Trees! Trees and the environment – trees are static so we need to find a way to make them fun!'"

Eventually, with the help of a consultant, a bank loan and a grant from the Wales Tourist Board, the idea of making trees fun was developed, and in 1993 The GreenWood Centre was launched on a 17-acre plot of land which consisted of little more than "trees, rushes, a bog and some rocks".

Today, GreenWood Forest Park spans some 27 acres and has over 20 rides and activities, with kindness to the environment at the heart of it all. Every ride and activity at GreenWood is environmentally friendly: the Green Dragon Rollercoaster, for example, is 'people-powered', using 200-year old funicular technology that was developed in the slate quarrying industry. The Park's latest big attraction, the Solar Splash, is the UK's first solar-powered ride. And the mission remains unchanged: make trees and the environment fun, so that children become engaged with the message.

In the years since it opened, GreenWood has won several awards and regularly features in 'top 10' lists of the UK's best family attractions. Stephen and Andrea have both received MBEs for services to the Welsh tourism industry - one of their proudest moments according to Andrea. "It's very difficult to choose [a proudest moment] as there have been so many," she says. "Getting our MBEs was one, but it's the everyday stuff too – just realising what we've achieved. If you walk through the park and I'm gardening... people sometimes think I'm the gardener, and I realise I started all this from scratch and look how it's grown. I'm always very proud about that, and we're always proud of the great team we've built."

Andrea is passionate about employing local people to work at GreenWood. "We try to employ local people as much as possible," she says, before explaining that there are 17 local people employed at GreenWood on a permanent and full-time basis, as well as ten seasonal workers during the winter months and a hundred during the summer season.

Staffing is just one part of GreenWood's 'buying locally' policy.

"Our policy is basically to buy locally as much as possible throughout the business, including staff and local services," Andrea explains. "Entertainers at the park tend to be local people, as do the craftspeople we hire to do the craft sessions with kids."

"One of the craftsmen makes wooden mushrooms [from GreenWood's forest] during the winter," Andrea continues. "Then these are used at GreenWood for kids to paint during craft workshops. So that's a product that is extremely local! Also we save jam jars throughout the year and these are used in craft workshops too – during Hallowe'en week they're made into lanterns and then there's a lantern parade."

GreenWood's ethos is mostly about the environment, but of course buying locally is part of that. Although stocking a few imported items in the shop is 'unavoidable', they prefer low-footfall products. For example, they saw logs to improve the forest and then have the log slices engraved on-site for sale in the shop, and they use wood from the park during the Hallowe'en besom-making workshops for young visitors. "And you can't get much more local than that!" Andrea laughs.

Even GreenWood's eateries don't escape the 'buy local' ethos. A lot of the food and drink products at the park are sourced locally, including beef burgers and sausage rolls from Llechwedd Butchery in Llangefni, sausages from Edwards of Conwy and frozen foods from Harlech Food Service.

With so much already happening at GreenWood, are there any big developments visitors can look forward to next year?

"We don't reveal future developments until the spring," Andrea teases. "That's our policy. But as this year we had a major development with the launch of Solar Splash, 2017 will be more about exciting small developments rather than a huge one." Whatever is announced in spring 2017 won't be anything on the scale of Solar Splash, Andrea says, but "we are always reinventing ourselves, because the product has to be fresh."

With so much important ecological work already being done at GreenWood, and so much effort being made to support the local community through buying goods and services and employing staff locally, Andrea's final statement comes as a surprise – albeit a very inspirational one: "You can always improve when it comes to the environment and buying locally... yes, we can improve on being local."

I'm not sure how such a locally-focused business as GreenWood could possibly get even better at 'being local', but having visited the Park and witnessed first-hand the amazing work they've done in this area to date, I'm sure that whatever these improvements are, they'll be an inspiration to us all.

A craft fair is for life, not just for Christmas!

Originally published in November 2016

As craft fair season hits Gwynedd at full force, our webmistress muses that they're a great way to shop locally all year round – not just at Christmas...

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Goodness me – is it really craft fair 'season' again? It comes around so quickly, doesn't it? One minute you're opening sackloads of Valentine's cards and the next you're checking the Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd craft fair calendar to see how many fairs you can fit in before Christmas.

For me, this is a crucial time of year. As a craftswoman I have stalls at craft fairs throughout the year, but at Christmas the activity intensifies to the point where it becomes almost an obsession; not only am I spending most weekends at craft fairs, but often doing evening ones at schools too. And somehow I have to also find time to make the things I'm selling, as well as do my 'day job'. As for housework... what's that, exactly?

While building the craft fair calendar it seemed to me that this year there are more fairs in Gwynedd than ever – or perhaps that's just a matter of perception! There appear to be a lot more school fairs and late shopping events than usual, in addition to the annual 'big ones' like Portmeirion, Glynllifon and Hwyl yr Wyl Pwllheli.

The thought occurs that we could all benefit from shopping at craft fairs all year round, not just at Christmas.

Quite aside from the amount of fun these events tend to be (there's usually entertainment of some sort), the things you can buy at craft fairs in Gwynedd are diverse and wonderful, and very often unique.

Yes, you'll see lots of things you can buy as gifts, either for yourself or for someone else. But there's a lot more to buy besides presents. Most craft fairs have a good number of food stalls too, selling everything from olives, cheeses and handmade sausages to jams, artisan breads and alcoholic drinks. Most of these stalls have samples you can try before you buy, and often there are cookery demonstrations too - so a day at a craft fair means an opportunity to discover new ways to shop locally for your groceries and then cook them, as well as new ways to accessorise your home or buy a treat for someone special.

And here's a little fact that may surprise you: often you'll see big brand names at craft fairs, being sold by local business owners. Two good examples of these are Usborne Books and The Body Shop at Home. These are both franchises which enable people to start their own businesses selling products that already have an established market - meaning that although you're buying big-name products, it's actually a local business that benefits.

Another good reason to visit craft fairs all year round is the amount of good they do for communities, schools and other local organisations. Stallholders can pay anything from £5 to hundreds of pounds for a selling space at a craft fair, and in many cases the proceeds go toward a good cause of some sort. Case in point – a couple of weeks ago I had a stall at a craft fair in Nefyn which was being held to raise money for a local children's charity. In the space of an hour and a half I'd made back my table fee almost 20 times over, and the charity was £800 better off.

Likewise, the table fees raised at Hwyl yr Wyl will go toward next year's event. This year there's a free land train, a Santa's grotto and all sorts of entertainment, all funded from the proceeds of last year's event. Hwyl yr Wyl brings more people into the town, which means many of the local shops will benefit. The same goes for Nadolig Betws-y-Coed Christmas and other similar events. It really is a win-win situation!

So please, do take a look at our craft fairs calendar and choose at least one to visit during this festive season. Just go along and show some support – you don't have to buy anything,

but just being there shows the organisers there's a reason to do it again next year. And that's something that many people in Gwynedd will benefit from, so you can consider it your little Christmas present to the community!

Inigo Jones Slate Works: supporting local crafters is a fait accompli this Christmas

Originally published in December 2016

Inigo Jones Slate Works has been producing slate goods for over 150 years. But did you know they also support other Welsh artists? We sent our blogger to investigate...

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I was pleased to hear that my latest assignment was a trip to Inigo Jones Slate Works on the outskirts of Groeslon, Caernarfon. Because having visited the shop a few times in the past to buy gifts and show my visiting parents some of North Wales' best quality slate goods, I'd never really learned that much about the business. Well, all that was about to change!

The purpose for my visit was actually two-fold. I was interviewing the shop's manager, Sue, for an article I was writing for another client's blog. But as Prynu'n Lleol also wanted a shopping article with a really local flavour, this was a great opportunity to do both.

As I learned during my visit Inigo Jones Slate Works, which was founded in 1861 and originally provided writing slates to schools, does a lot to support the work of artists from not just the local area, but all over Wales.

Sue told me that local suppliers are essential to the shop's stock. The business is very keen to support local crafters and artists, and Inigo Jones tend to lean more towards products with a Celtic feel.

Many of the products available at Inigo Jones were made by Welsh artists and makers. There's a fantastic selection of prints, toys, Welsh-language books, greetings cards, jewellery and even novelty items like greetings cards made from sheep poo!

There's a wonderful range of pottery on sale at the shop which is crafted by a lady at Glynllifon, for example, and there's locally-made chocolate too. The slate jewellery is especially popular, as every piece is unique (that being the nature of slate, of course).

And it goes without saying that there's a vast choice of really beautiful items made from slate, which are created on-site by the company's own crafters.

What I found quite exciting, being a craftsperson myself, was the fact that artists can have their designs printed onto slate at Inigo Jones for resale through their own sales channels (for example, craft fairs and Etsy stores). Some such pieces even end up on sale at Inigo Jones' own showroom – some of the clocks currently on sale there are good examples of this.

Well, that certainly got my grey matter working overtime, I can tell you! My head is now full of ideas for things I could print onto slate; next step, have a proper chat with Sue, do some sums, and start designing!

Another way that Inigo Jones encourages artistic ability is through its workshop tours, which are self-guided. These begin with a 10-minute film about the history of slate (which I watched – fascinating stuff), and other tour highlights include an opportunity to try your hand at engraving calligraphy onto a piece of slate yourself. To my mind, this bodes very well for the future of art and crafts in Wales, so if you have a budding artist in your family it's worth taking them on the tour.

There's only a couple of weeks left until Christmas, and as usual I'm woefully unprepared. However, I've made a big promise to myself this year - namely to do as much of my Christmas shopping as possible with local businesses. I still have a couple of craft fairs to sell at before the big day comes, and I'm fairly confident I'll be buying at these as well as selling... but I will also be sure to pay a visit to Inigo Jones, along with other local businesses

that sell locally-crafted items. My Christmas spirit this year is well-infused with buying locally spirit, I'm very pleased to report!

Products are available at www.inigojones.co.uk and at the Inigo Jones showroom in Groeslon, which is open 9-5 daily including weekends.

If you must shop large, shop local!

Originally published in December 2016

Let's face it – buying absolutely everything from small, independent, local businesses is a huge challenge. Especially at this time of year, when there's a lot you need to buy and budgets may be stretched further than usual. In this article, we look at how you can enjoy the best of both worlds: shop large, but shop local!

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It's that time of year again... presents to buy, feasts to prepare, halls to deck and all the usual panic and mayhem that goes with celebrating Christmas.

Shopping plays a huge part in the Christmas rituals, whether we like it or not. No matter how much we try to de-commercialise Christmas, the fact remains that we can't escape shopping completely.

If you're trying to stick to a budget, buying absolutely everything from small, local, or independent businesses is going to be a challenge. It doesn't matter how much we'd all *prefer* to support smaller businesses in theory; in reality it's extremely difficult to avoid the bigger businesses and chain stores completely. So what's the answer?

Our suggestion is to try to shop as locally as possible, even if that means giving your custom to large chain stores. Some of your money still stays somewhat local, benefiting the local economy, if you shop at Tesco Bangor or Asda Pwllheli, albeit to a lesser degree than if you'd shopped at a farm shop or local deli. That's because it's local people that staff these stores, and these employees will go on to spend their money in other local stores – which certainly isn't going to be the case if you shop in Chester, Liverpool or the Trafford Centre!

It does soften the blow if you aim to buy a few items at smaller businesses and the rest at chain stores. And when you have businesses like Boots offering 3 for 2 deals on gifts, or Lidl offering cut-price groceries, it's very difficult to say no!

But for those really special items – perhaps a luxury jar of cranberry sauce, or a handmade gift for a close relative who'd really appreciate it – there are some wonderful independent businesses in Gwynedd who'd really appreciate your custom, no matter how small your spend.

Craft fairs can also be a good source of bargains; in the final week before Christmas you may find makers dropping their prices to clear their old stock and make way for their new makes, so it's really worth doing the rounds of all the Christmas events if you have a few last-minute purchases to make.

And don't forget that many local business owners are actually franchisees for huge brands; Spar in Pwllheli is one such business, and they're famous for the amazing range of locally-produced foods they sell, which supports local farmers among others.

The Body Shop at Home is a franchise too – in North Wales it's managed by Sioned Richards, who arranges their attendance at fairs as well as organising 'Body Shop parties' at customers' homes. Big brand, small business – and plenty of bargains to be had too, if you join [Sioned's Facebook group](#)!

So let's not beat ourselves up this Christmas if smaller pay packets and rising prices mean we can't buy absolutely everything from small shops or direct from the makers. Even if 99% of what we buy this Christmas comes from big businesses, as long as we stick to our local high streets instead of crossing over the border, we're doing our bit.

After all, as a certain retail giant likes to keep reminding us: "every little helps"!

Snowdonia Pass: save money when you spend locally

Originally published in January 2017

A year on from its conception, Snowdonia Pass is wowing tourists, businesses and local residents alike with its great money-saving deals.

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A collaborative project between Attractions of Snowdonia, Gwynedd Council and Visit Wales, Snowdonia Pass launched in May 2016 and to date has signed up over 50 businesses and distributed hundreds of passes to individuals.

The idea behind Snowdonia Pass is to market the wider tourism sector across Gwynedd, Conwy and Anglesey with one singular product. The aim is to increase footfall in local businesses during quieter periods, and to encourage repeat visits to local businesses.

What exactly is Snowdonia Pass?

Snowdonia Pass is a plastic card, roughly the same size as a credit card. It costs £5 to buy, and once you have one you can use it to claim a wide array of deals and offers from participating businesses.

These businesses operate in the tourism, retail and hospitality sectors in Anglesey, Gwynedd and Conwy, and include accommodation providers, attractions and activity providers, retailers, restaurants and providers of travel services.

Who provides the deals?

Some of Snowdonia's best-known businesses have signed up to offer deals through Snowdonia Pass. These include the Snowdon Mountain Railway, Portmeirion, GreenWood Forest Park and Surf Snowdonia.

But it's not only for big businesses; many smaller businesses have joined, too. Hotels, restaurants, shops, and even bicycle hire companies offer deals to consumers through Snowdonia Pass.

Isn't it just for tourists?

Not at all! The beauty of Snowdonia Pass is that it's perfect for local residents as well as visitors. In fact, if you live in Gwynedd, Anglesey or Conwy and use your Snowdonia Pass all year round, you'll save a lot more than the average visitor to the region.

What sort of deals are included?

The deals and T&Cs differ from one participating business to the next, but one of the conditions of business membership is that the deal offered should represent a saving of at least 10%.

A few examples:

- Inigo Jones Slate Works offer 10% off in their shop on purchases over £10, plus 10% off self-guided tours.
- Kerfoots of Porthmadog offer 10% off store-wide, including in their cafe.
- Snowdon Mountain Railway offers 20% off return tickets on their diesel service.
- STORIEL offer a free sketchbook when you show your Snowdonia Pass.

These are just a few of the many offers available to pass-holders, but it's important to note that terms and conditions apply to most deals, so you should read each offer's 'deal details' page carefully before claiming your deal.

Sounds fab! How can I get a Snowdonia Pass?

Visit www.snowdoniapass.co.uk and click any 'buy a Pass' button or link. This will take you through to a secure ordering and payment page.

I have a business and would like to offer a deal. How can I get involved?

Membership for businesses costs £75 and includes many benefits, which you can find out about on the Snowdonia Pass website's "about us" page.

If you'd like to chat to the Snowdonia Pass team about becoming a member, please send an email to post@snowdoniapass.co.uk.

Eighteen months of buying locally – and lessons have been learned!

Originally published in March 2017

As the Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd project reaches its eighteen-month milestone, our webmistress looks back on the articles she's edited and written, and muses on all the things she's learned so far about buying locally.

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I've always taken the easiest options where shopping is concerned. The least hassle and the least expense have always been my motivators – as they are for most people, I suspect.

But looking after the Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd website, and editing and writing its blog posts, has been a real eye-opener and I'm proud to say that many of my shopping habits have changed in the 18 months that I've been involved in the project.

Before working on this project I shopped almost exclusively at big chain stores or with online giants. But although I haven't cut these businesses out of my life completely, they get far less of my money than they used to...

The thought of the impact of these huge businesses on the local economy rarely crossed my mind before I started this job. But as I've learned, how and where you spend your money can have huge implications for the local community.

It's been a genuinely fascinating journey so far, and I'm learning a lot as I go along.

I'm discovering that buying locally doesn't necessarily mean buying small. Gwynedd has some amazing success stories: [South Caernarfon Creameries](#) is a great example of a small local initiative growing into a large, successful business.

And I've learned that shopping locally can also be done without leaving the house; my grandsons love their Christmas presents which I bought online from Babi Pur, a [Gwynedd business which started small](#) and now enjoys national and even international success.

A few months ago I had the pleasure of [spending a day at GreenWood Forest Park](#) and learning first-hand about the great efforts they make to employ local people, use local suppliers and reduce the amount of harm done by businesses to the environment.

I'm learning that when local businesses work together, they can do great things to keep their local economies healthy – for example, [creating local currencies](#) and, in the case of [Inigo Jones](#), supporting local artists and craftspeople. [Snowdonia Pass](#) is an excellent example of businesses coming together to support an entire industry.

I've visited numerous Gwynedd towns and villages for Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd in the past year and a half – and may even visit a few more! These special shopping trips have already taken me to my nearest towns like [Caernarfon](#), [Pwllheli](#), [Porthmadog](#) and [Bangor](#), but also as far afield as [Dolgellau](#), [Bala](#) and [Harlech](#). As well as having fun on these trips, I bagged a few bargains and learned that there are some truly wonderful shops in Gwynedd. I hope to bag a few more on future assignments!

I've also learned what shopping locally means to other people.

Award-winning Gwynedd businesswoman Shoned Owen explained how [local businesses stocking her self-tanning products](#) was a crucial element in her success.

Musician and businessman Dafydd Iwan wrote about the [digital revolution and its effect on the ethos of buying locally](#).

Gwynedd farmer and businessman Gwion Llwyd suggested we [look at value rather than cost](#), when we make our buying decisions.

Chief Bard and publisher Myrddin ap Dafydd [sang the praises of traditional Welsh market towns](#) and wondered whether free parking would improve their fortunes.

And blogger Emily Prowse [took up our challenge](#) to replace a few essentials from her shopping basket with products that could be bought from local businesses.

Perhaps the most interesting experience of all, until now at least, was interviewing farmer Gareth Wyn Jones, who made me stop and think about where my food comes from – and where our locally-produced food ends up. Gareth had so much to say about the subject that I ended up writing three articles about him. The first introduced [the concept of 'food hubs'](#), the second suggested [teaching children about the origins of their food](#), and the third bemoaned [the lack of support from the Government and the pressure that supermarkets put on food producers](#). He's now on TV again, this time talking about dairy farming – so perhaps it's time for a catch-up!

During my time working on the project I started up a crafting business too, and wrote about [my experiences from the other side of the fence](#) – and let me tell you, once you've tried competing with imported factory knick-knacks you realise just how crucial it is to support small local businesses. I learned about the hard work involved in selling at craft fairs, and I'm realising [how important these events are to communities all year round](#) – not just at the Christmas 'peak fair season'.

Probably the biggest lesson I'm taking away from Prynu'n Lleol Gwynedd, though, is just how little we need to do as individuals to make a big impact on our local economy. Changing our shopping habits so that we [spend just £5 a week at a local business instead of at a big chain](#) means that rather than contributing towards an overseas millionaire's umpteenth holiday home or sports car, we're paying for little Bethan's ballet lessons, helping to buy little Osian a new pair of football boots, or putting food on the Joneses' table for another week.

And really, there's no greater incentive than that!

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Debs Williams is webmistress of the Prynu'n Lleol website. She's a self-employed [marketer](#), [copywriter](#) and [website creator](#) and also has a [small crafting business](#). Originally from London, Debs has lived in Gwynedd since July 2000 and is a self-taught Welsh speaker.