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# Generations Review



Swansea 2017 Conference review

# EDITORIAL

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At Swansea we had much to plan for the BSG conference that happened in July, so that's my excuse for not getting out

an edition of GR earlier in the year. I hope this 60 page+ edition more than makes up for it. And what a conference it was in Swansea, even if I do say so myself. We put on some lovely additional extras this year which have involved getting more input from older people themselves, something we advocate strongly in research and practice terms and need to do more with in terms of conferences. It was great to see so many members and guests enjoying themselves there. But don't just take my word for it, several short reports fill the latter pages of this edition from people who were given bursaries to attend this year. We move to Manchester for 2018 and again will run a bursary scheme, check the website details for more information.

**Happy reading and please do send me your articles!**

**Charles Musselwhite**

**Swansea University,**

**Swansea October 2017**



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**The British Society of Gerontology's 2017 Conference** was held at Swansea University's new Bay Campus, July 5-7. It was very well attended and the weather really helped everyone enjoy the conference on the beach. There were plenty of great papers delivered and also opportunities to play hard as well as work hard. We have 9 short reports of the conference here from early career researchers and students who were awarded prestigious BSG bursaries to attend.



Photo: Martin Morgan



## The lived experience of a PhD student at the BSG conference 2017

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### Abstract

This paper sets out the findings of a four-day research study into my student PhD experience at the BSG conference 2017. Qualitative methods were used including diary keeping and self-evaluation of personal conference objectives being met. Findings from the diary and the self-evaluation converged to reveal a positive student experience at the BSG conference. Limitations of the study suggest the need for further student research at future BSG conferences.

### The BSG conference experience

A diary narrative for each day is followed by a student evaluation of objectives achieved. A subjective Likert Scale was used with four possible scores; 1 not achieved; 2 some way to go; 3 getting there; 4 fully achieved.

**Emerging Researchers in Ageing (ERA) conference day 1:** after a long journey, feeling weary, I received a warm welcome from the ERA reception team. Before the conference I visited Swansea Bay beach – an opportunity for a mindful moment to support my wellbeing.

The ERA conference was opened with a keynote speech by Professor Christina Victor and Dr Martin Hyde, who encouraged emerging researchers to publish and advised that reviewing journal articles really helps you to learn how to write well.

<b>Student evaluation of conference objectives for day 1 of the ERA conference:</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Likert Score</b>
1. Gained new knowledge	4
2. Contributed to debate in relevant subject areas	3
3. Developed networks with other BSG members	3
4. Enjoyed the day and / or had fun	4
5. Had 'me time' to recharge batteries	4

**ERA conference day 2:** up bright and early for the first ERA session. Themes of social exclusion, isolation and loneliness ran through the presentations (not something I have experienced at this BSG conference!). It was interesting to hear different research methodologies used. All stressed the importance of taking forward policy implications into practice. After a quick break, we heard important trends and projections for dementia in England and Wales, as well as how adverse events over the life-course impact on trajectories of wellbeing and depression. Food for thought for my own research on living with dementia in extra care housing. The ERA conference closed.



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<b><i>Student evaluation of conference objectives for day 2 of the ERA conference:</i></b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<b>Likert Score</b>
1. Gained new knowledge	4
2. Contributed to debate in relevant subject areas	3
3. Developed networks with other BSG members	3
4. Enjoyed the day and / or had fun	3
5. Had 'me time' to recharge batteries	2

### ***BSG conference day 1:***

The Music in Mind singers set the bar high with a rousing 'We'll keep a welcome in the hills of Wales'. Professor Dawn Brooker gave an informative and challenging keynote speech about working with people affected by dementia – saying '*it's not them and us, it's 'us''*'. We also heard about the innovative MeetingDem project for people with dementia and their carers; I have come away fired up to find out more about the 'adaption and coping' model it is based on.

I looked forward to the afternoon sessions, but which sessions to choose when I wanted to hear bits of each? Oh, for the day when robotics can duplicate me so that I can attend them all!

The symposia offered much to reflect on. 'Positive experiences of living with and caring for someone with dementia' helped me consider how I cross the bridge between professional and carer of a family member with dementia. Lively discussion of 'hope' and 'gratitude' in both care-giving and living with dementia contributed to the discourse about positive aspects of dementia. It was also exciting to hear that PhD student Charlotte Stoner has developed new scales to measure positive psychology for people with dementia. The session concluded by stressing that people living with more advanced dementia must not be neglected within research and practice developments.

After a full afternoon it was good to recharge my batteries before the BSG prize giving. Professor Alan Walker gave this year's prize jointly to Professors Clare Wenger and Christina Victor. How lucky we are to have such an eminent field of gerontologists that it was impossible to choose only one prize-winner. To round off we had a BBQ on the beach front entertained by Circus Eruption – a rewarding day soaking up new information, enjoying lively debate, renewing old and making new friendships.



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### ***Student evaluation of conference objectives for day 1 of the BSG conference:***

Objective	Likert Score
1. Gained new knowledge	4
2. Contributed to debate in relevant subject areas	4
3. Developed networks with other BSG members	4
4. Enjoyed the day and / or had fun	4
5. Had 'me time' to recharge batteries	3

### ***BSG conference day 2:***

Not for me the early morning 5K fun run! Conversation was still buzzing at breakfast, good job I'm an early morning person. This morning covered my own research interests with discussion of extra care housing past, present and future. The imperative to link research findings to policy, implementation, and practice in the field of extra care or specialist housing with care was reinforced. With trepidation, I delivered my own research in a short session after the break. I needn't have worried – the BSG crowd were very nurturing and supportive! Still, I was glad to relax in Professor Norah Keating's key note speech where she challenged us with big ideas on visioning a good old age and moving towards a global ecological framework.

After the all-important lunchtime networking I enjoyed more mindfulness on the beach – future BSG conferences have a lot to live up to!

Techniques for managing communication with people living with dementia were explored after lunch. That set me thinking about my own communication techniques ahead of the lively gala dinner and entertainment. The Swansea U3A ukulele band were just as stirring as the after-dinner speaker Beti George.

### ***Student evaluation of conference objectives for day 2 of the BSG conference:***

Objective	Likert Score
1. Gained new knowledge	4
2. Contributed to debate in relevant subject areas	4
3. Developed networks with other BSG members	4
4. Enjoyed the day and / or had fun	4
5. Had 'me time' to recharge batteries	3

### ***BSG conference day 3:***

Day three continued apace. The conference really was a marathon not a sprint; but as noon drew closer so too did the end of the conference. It concluded with some moving stories from "Re-Live" showing how creative arts can tap into hidden parts of our personal identity, and help individuals live with dementia. I was glad I didn't sneak out to catch an early train!



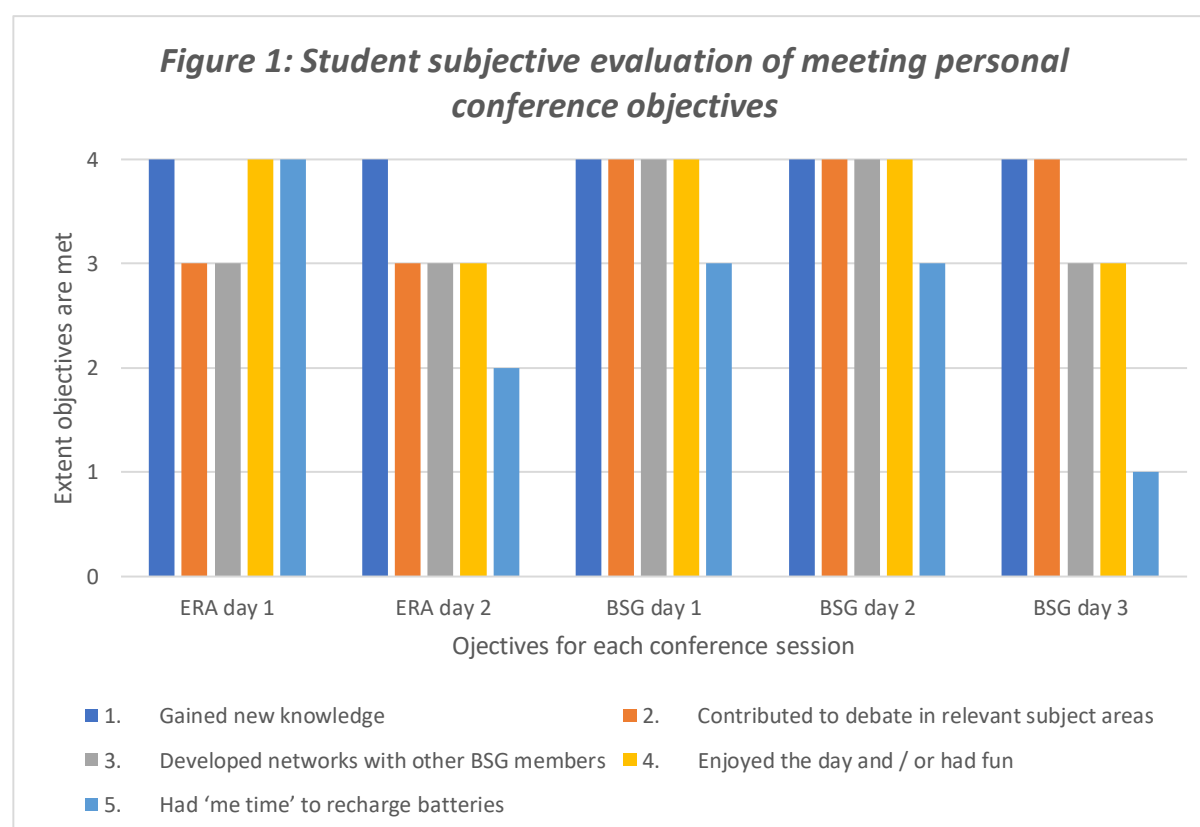
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**Student evaluation of conference objectives for day 2 of the BSG conference:**

Objective	Likert Score
1. Gained new knowledge	4
2. Contributed to debate in relevant subject areas	4
3. Developed networks with other BSG members	3
4. Enjoyed the day and / or had fun	3
5. Had 'me time' to recharge batteries	1

**Discussion of the findings:**

Figure 1 summarises the subjective evaluations of how well my student personal conference objectives were met. The majority were fully achieved or getting there. Only one was not achieved, having 'me time' on the last day.



The convergence of findings from the diary narrative and the subjective evaluation of conference objectives suggests PhD students benefit from attending the BSG conference. Caution is urged in interpreting the findings. Key points of note are:

The findings are based only on one PhD student view, and are not generalisable.

They provide good insights into the value of the BSG conference, and should encourage other PhD researchers to attend future conferences. To make the study more robust it would be beneficial to replicate it – essential to attend BSG annual conference 2018 in Manchester!



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## Conference Review

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I was lucky enough to be offered a free place to attend the 46<sup>th</sup> British Society of Gerontology (BSG) Conference - “Do Not Go Gentle – Gerontology and the Good Gold Age” – at Swansea University. It was a great opportunity for me to become more involved with the BSG and to gain knowledge and experience from others who work to research and promote healthy ageing. The audience was mixed, providing a valuable opportunity to engage with peers and senior academics within a multidisciplinary environment. What I think it is really special about the BSG conference, is the ability to create a positive and friendly environment. I have enjoyed how easy it is to engage with leading academics, and everyone is genuinely approachable. As an early career researcher, finding an inclusive environment has been very beneficial.

The relaxed atmosphere of the conference was enhanced by its beautiful surroundings. Swansea University Bay Campus was a fantastic place to stay, with its views from the sea and beach.

By attending this conference, I was able to present my PhD research on “Interventions for respect and social inclusion in older people and their impact on health and wellbeing: A systematic review”, in a constructively critical, but supportive environment. I received good questions and positive feedback from the audience during and after the session, which was a great way to networking. Opportunities to network were also enhanced through the organised social activities, including the Gala dinner on Thursday night, and the BBQ and Cir-



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## Conference Review

cus eruption on Wednesday. The BBQ took place in the seafront, and many attendees (including me!) walked along the beach to admire the sunset.

Given the broad spectrum of gerontology, I learnt about what others are doing from related fields, and this has stimulated me to consider other angles of my research. I benefitted hugely from two symposiums: “Developing Age-Friendly Communities: Research and Policy Perspectives from Brussels, Manchester and Montreal” and “Visual Methods in Generating and Representing Counter-Stories of Later Life”. Both were very related to my PhD research and to my interests on developing Age-friendly environments, the use of visual methods, and participatory research. Furthermore, I found particularly inspiring the symposiums on “Dementia and Imagination” and “Inequalities in Later Life: Towards a New Agenda for Research, Policy and Practice”. There was a good mix of early career researchers as well as leading academics in the field of ageing.

Receiving this free place meant a lot to me and to my career. I presented findings from my PhD research while working on my first post-doc project (which is exploring a different topic). This was made possible by funding available for early career researchers. Thank you BSG for supporting researchers at my career stage and for another wonderful BSG conference.

I would thoroughly recommend the conference to students and researchers interested in ageing and I look forward to Manchester 2018!



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**Dr Brian Beach, Senior Research Fellow, International Longevity Centre – UK (ILC-UK)**

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The annual conference of BSG is a wonderful opportunity for those of us interested in later life and gerontology to come together, exchange ideas, and learn about new developments in our field. This year was no exception, enhanced by the fortunately beautiful weather in Swansea along with strong organisation and great facilities.

I was fortunate this year to have two presentations at the event and for my organisation, ILC-UK, to have a stand brilliantly located near the area where delegates could get food and refreshments. Indeed, at lunch times, this proved a stellar opportunity to engage with people – new and known – regarding our work as they patiently queued for the wide range of options to recharge their batteries. At a busy conference like BSG, this was a great opportunity to catch up with colleagues whose time was limited as well as make new connections and share

what we do to put a policy perspective on gerontological research.

As for my research, I first spoke about the work we did in 2016 as part of the Drink Wise, Age Well campaign. This was the second year of the campaign, and we are involved in drafting annual research reports around various perspectives as they intersect with alcohol use in later life. I reported on work we did looking at labour force participation, and how experiences in employment, unemployment, and retirement relate to alcohol use. The research involved some straightforward statistical analysis, but was largely informed by three inquiry sessions featuring evidence from academics, service providers and users, and industry figures. The findings are too wide-ranging to describe here, but the report can be found [here](#).

The Drink Wise, Age Well campaign includes various interventions in five sites across the UK to help older people learn about risks from alcohol use, and although I could not report on any findings from the intervention itself, the rest of the session featured other presentations that included: a pilot



## Conference Review



Photo: Martin Morgan

scheme in primary care; family involvement in diagnosis in nursing homes; how lawyers involved in drafting powers of attorney can enable health discussions; using patients' perspectives to understand unscheduled care (i.e. use of A&E); and a feasibility study on a home-based health promotion intervention. These all provide useful insights and novel approaches to improving care provision and health in later life.

My second presentation reported on findings from a large piece of work on inequalities in later life. I presented the results from a scoping review looking at the evidence related to how inequalities relate to outcomes in social connections. The symposium began with an overview on the conceptualisation of later life inequalities from Prof Tom Scharf, followed by findings from the WHERL project on inequalities and paid work in later life from BSG President, Debora Price. The symposium ended with a presentation from Suzanne Moffatt on the impact from a seven-year social prescribing initiative. The symposium was highly stimulating and generated a certain degree of praise for its efforts to bring the concepts of inequalities and vulnerable groups into studies on later life.

Part of my work portfolio includes looking at housing in later life, considering both mainstream, general housing as well as various forms of housing with care. I was particularly interested in the sym-

posium organised by Simon Evans on designing housing and care for later life. The presentations in this symposium looked at design issues as they relate to the layout of residential care settings, adaptations in the home, supporting those with dementia, and standards to reduce susceptibility to a cold home environment. The distinct topics covered in the four presentations demonstrate not only the importance of the home environment for people in later life, but also the range of issues that must be addressed to improve conditions for all people as they age. More importantly, perhaps, the presentations provided insights into solutions that make a difference.

Photo: Martin Morgan



The BSG conference was a rich experience yet again, with a great volume of new and relevant research available for learning. I listened to a number of other presentations, but the ones highlighted above reflect my own contributions and a particularly engaging symposium that resonated with an area of great interest in the policy world. I'm extremely grateful to BSG for providing the bursary to cover the costs of attending, and I look forward to another great collection of brilliant minds and advanced research at next year's conference in Manchester!



**Hayley James ( [hayley.james@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:hayley.james@manchester.ac.uk) )**

The British Society of Gerontology Annual Conference 2017 was held in at Swansea University from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> July. I was fortunate to have a paper accepted as part of a symposium and be awarded a bursary to attend by the conference organisers, so I was excited and apprehensive to be taking part in the first big conference of my PhD.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> July I attended the Emerging Researchers in Ageing session, which is a smaller part of the conference particularly for junior researchers. I was able to see presentations from fellow researchers on their work, and it was fascinating to see the broad scope of research being undertaken by the group. I also got to present a very draft paper I was working on, about the interpersonal influences on pension decision-making, and received some really useful questions and feedback. I decided to use the opportunity to test an innovative method I have been considering using in my research, which involves making poems out of interview data. I showed one to the group, and people found it useful in demonstrating the meaning from an interview in a quickly digestible way.

There was also a very useful session on 'Insights into the Publication Process' by Christina Victor and Martin Hyde. They gave us their perspective as editors of *Ageing and Society*, in terms of the submission process and what they are looking for from submission. This was incredibly valuable for early career researchers and I really enjoyed the session.

The main conference started on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July, with the key note speech from Professor Dawn Brooker, who spoke about 'There is no us and them. There's only us: Reflections on supporting people living with dementia post-diagnosis'. She ended with a very sobering slide about the impact

of austerity on dementia research.

That afternoon, I was presenting a paper as part of the symposium 'Lifecourse influences on health and wellbeing in later life'. In the first half, Dr Laurie Corna and Lawrence Sacco from Kings and Dr Giorgio di Gessa from LSE presented on their work as part of the Wellbeing Health, Retirement and the Life-course project. In the second half, Martin Hyde from Swansea presented on '*Lifelong learning and labour market exit in later life. Evidence from 6 waves of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing*', Debbie Price spoke about on '*How do female lifecourses affect income in retirement?*' and I presented my paper, '*Pension decision-making during the life-course*'.

I felt quite nervous since the quality of presentations had been very high in the symposium and throughout the conference. Also the research presented in the symposium before my turn had all been based on quantitative methods, and there had been some challenging methodological questions. Since my research was qualitative, I didn't know what to expect from the audience.

My paper considered how possible selves, which mean how we see ourselves in the future, affect individual pension decision making. I felt the presentation went well, and there were good questions afterwards, with a lot of people showing an interest in my study. There were some challenges around ensuring lower income people participate, and afterwards I had a really useful conversation about the role of self-efficacy in constructing possible selves, which has since steered my research in a very fruitful and interesting direction.

Once my presentation was done I took the opportunity to find out more about other research in the field. It was great seeing my peers from MICRA





## Conference Review

there too – Samuèle Remillard-Boilard gave a great presentation on her work on age-friendly cities, and Ema Johnson was the winner of the poster competition for her work on older people's food provisioning. I also helped on the MICRA stall with giving out information sheets and getting people signed up to our mailing lists. We had a lot of interest which was great.

Overall I had a fantastic time at the BSG with thanks to the support I received. Next year the BSG conference will be in Manchester and I am on the organising committee, so attending this year made me realise what a great feat lies ahead of us! The Swansea team did a great job and I hope we can follow in their footsteps.



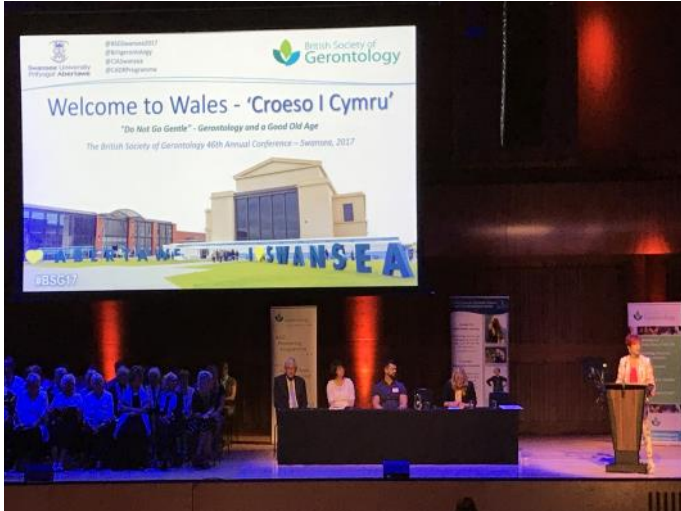
Photo: Martin Morgan





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The beautiful Welsh countryside made for a stunning train journey to Swansea for the British Society of Gerontology Conference 2017. This was my second time attending a BSG conference and I had enjoyed the conference at Stirling so much the year before, I was really excited for this one. I had been told that Swansea had its own micro climate and it did not disappoint. I arrived to a bright and sunny campus for the first day of talks and started by taking a look through the varied array of posters, while grabbing a sandwich from the lunchtime buffet.

On the first day I was particularly interested in Amy Jenkins' talk about subjective cognitive impairment (SCI) because in one of my PhD studies I recruited participants with SCI. I had to develop my own criteria and cut off for recruitment because SCI is not well defined. Amy recruited her participants using the cognitive change index and found that there was a relationship between SCI scores and Trails scores.

Hearing about the thoughts and histories of gerontologists at the BSG Archives Launch Event emphasised the importance of the discipline and the passion of those involved.

The striking portraits of the gerontologists flipped aging research on its head, looking at it from the perspective of the researchers themselves, making for an intriguing contrast to the majority of conference content.

I enjoyed presenting and received some interesting and thought provoking questions. My talk presented findings from one of my PhD studies, which investigated the relationship of computer use patterns and cognitive and functional abilities in people with cognitive decline.

In the same session that I presented in, Hayley Wright discussed her research looking at the relationship between regular sexual activity and increased cognitive ability. Hayley found that dissatisfaction with sex was related to better cognitive function, which contradicted their predictions. Hayley explained that a potential theory to explain this could be that moderate stress is linked to increased cognitive function. I wondered what the biological underpinnings of these findings might be, so it will be interesting to hear the results from her future planned research which will look at biological factors such as oxytocin and cortisol.

In the same session Josie Tetley discussed the use of wearable technology to reduce social isolation. It was useful to hear Josie discuss the challenges of this sort of research as this information is essential for improving future research in this area. For example, they had found that some older adults struggled with the use the technology and found it was always helpful to have a family member who was tech savvy. Overall conclusions highlighted the need for improved design in technology for people with dementia and the importance of support from the family.

The beach BBQ on the Wednesday evening was absolutely fantastic. The food was great and I particularly enjoyed the veggie sausages and the sweet potato – yum! The views were spectacular and it was a fitting celebration at the end of a great first day.

Some interesting questions were asked in the first cognition and dementia session on Thursday. Emma Richards discussed intra individual variability in visual attention and processing speed for people with vascular cognitive impairment. Emma also raised some interesting discussion points relating to a question about how to inform healthy participants if they score below normal range on cognitive assessments and the challenges surrounding this in relation to ethics.

I had a wonderful time at The Gala Dinner on Thursday evening. Beti George provided a passionate, captivating and moving talk about her experiences of caring for her husband David Parry-Jones who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2009 and who passed away in April this year. This was followed by some uplifting music from the Swansea U3A Ukeulele Big Band.

On Friday, Dawn Brooker provided a useful overview of an adaptive implementation of an initiative from Amsterdam, which provides meeting support programmes for people with dementia and their families in local community settings. Dawn made an important point that adaptations of these sorts of initiatives in other countries do not just involve translation of the language. This was useful for my research as I have been working on a cultural validation of a measure of instrumental activities of daily living that was originally developed in Amsterdam.

I was really interested to hear about the dementia

dogs project. The dogs gave reminders to drink and make meals and provided security to allow the person with dementia to be on their own in public spaces. Content analysis revealed that third parties enabled the program to work well, as they could step in to help look after the dog if the caring needs changed. The bonds that developed between the participants and the dogs were very strong and communication and motivation improved as a result. For example, it gave them a new talking point and a reason to do more exercise.

The final keynote address, where Karin and Alison described their life story work, was engaging, emotive and inspiring. Karin highlighted how music can unlock people's energy and improve the lives of people with dementia and can even result in a reduction of medication. They emphasised the importance of asking care workers about their lives, experiences and regrets in order to truly engage with the life stories of the people they care for. Terri, a writer and performer in the group, advocated the importance of this work saying that the life story project "should be on prescription". I thought this was a perfectly pitched and fitting end to a fantastic BSG conference.

I would like to say a big thank you to the Swansea BSG conference organisers for giving me the opportunity to attend a fantastic conference and I hope to be able to attend again in Manchester next year.



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# Back to the Future

Jim Traynor

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I parked my car outside the coffee shop on the precinct and wandered over towards where I thought registration was taking place. This was my second visit to Swansea University. The first had been thirty minutes earlier as a result of my car's sat nav system directing me to a different campus on the other side of town. The post code for this new campus was not recognised by the sat nav and, seemingly being one of the few senior gerontologists not to have graduated from Swansea's Geography department, I found it a challenge locating the building site doubling as the conference hub for the 2017 BSG conference.

I had only walked about fifty metres when I bumped into Mim Bernard and Jackie Reynolds from Keele University who had also just arrived along with Mo Ray. Appropriate really, as my attendance was a result of them identifying me for inclusion in their research project on the Ageing of British Gerontology.

With sporadic departmental financial support I regularly attended the annual BSG conferences in the seventies, eighties and early nineties but found

the demands of practicing as a senior manager in a large local authority increasingly challenging. Continuing local authority funding cuts meant that my energies had to focus on the delivery of a quality service to adults and their families. I loved working with and leading committed and compassionate social services staff. The variety of daily challenges were formidable. I was accountable for a multi million pound budget including the vetting of individual care plans. There was the challenge of trying to both develop and protect local services and then grappling with whether to support cases likely heading towards judicial review or the House of Lords. I loved trying to grasp and understand the implications of emerging judicial findings for practice at a time of continuous changing legislation. Such as; how does one decide whether to apply to disregard the wishes of mentally competent older parents whose adult child physically drew demarcation lines and paths on the floor of 'their' house within which they had to remain. The parents while requesting and requiring protection from being disciplined by their child for crossing these boundaries, would not lend succour to any agency trying to constrain their offspring's actions. Who's human rights?

My first annual BSG conference was Hull in 1980/81 (?) and here I was some 35+ years later and



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## Conference Review

slightly nervous as I hadn't attended in years. My last conference reflection in *Generations Review* was December 1995. Would I understand the papers? Would it be slightly alien? Would anyone talk to me? I felt a bit like a novice attendee. But, I really enjoyed it even although I struggled at times to contain my anger at the research cataloguing the ongoing exclusion and exploitation of the older, poorer and disadvantaged in our wealthy country. I remember Simon Biggs years ago highlighting that the minimum wage or below for front line carers perpetuated poverty for them in retirement. And that was way before 'zero hours contracts?'

It was good seeing familiar faces and getting to know some new ones. A personal regret was not making the effort to engage individually with BSG colleagues that I do not know so well and to thank them for their contribution supporting my work as a social care practitioner and gerontologist. I missed some who were not able to attend or who did not want to engage again with the society or conference. I confess that I was also unsure how I

would feel at coming back as I have nursed a selfish sense of pique at the lack of acknowledgement of the contribution of practitioners in the field of ageing; often being seen as offering no more than mere empty vessels to be filled by academic knowledge. Would these sour grapes spoil my experience. They didn't! One thing that hadn't changed at conference was the dilemma of choosing which papers to

Photo: Martin Morgan



attend from a matrix of competing strands. Also surprisingly unaffected by the passage of time were the challenges posed by space, equipment and acoustics: Too few chairs; can't hear the speakers; too hot/cold/sunny/noisy; not enough time to pre-

Photo: Martin Morgan





## Conference Review

sent... Something that hadn't changed was the enthusiasm of attendees and the general warmth of welcome extended to old and new participants.



I admire the rafts of new researchers establishing themselves in gerontology and the best of these appeared to me to have benefited considerably from the quality of support from their supervisors. (Slow down and take another bow, Christine Victor.) The topics on offer were as always varied but I did, however, notice some papers poor in presentation and seemingly lacking in depth in their literature searches. A poor reflection not on them but their mentors? The after dinner speech by Beti George was perfect; powerful, short, succinct and heartfelt. A gem.

When mulling over the conference on my long drive home, I mused that what was crucially missing for me overall at conference was the sense of an overarching sociological and political analysis of the positioning of older people in society such as I remember being invoked in earlier times by Alan

Walker and Chris Phillipson amongst others.

I reflected that maybe my small individual contribution to gerontology practice was the daily challenging of both the theory and practice of marginalising older people as a sub class of society who are somehow different to the rest. I think it was Sartre who said that his old age was other people.

I would like to thank those who shared their conference with me. I enjoyed meeting you and hope to see you in Manchester. My draft paper for then is titled; Me Me Me!

Jim Traynor



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It's the first week of July, the sun is shining and many of us are making our way to Swansea for what will be the annual pilgrimage to the British Society of Gerontology Conference. This year is special for me, it has been seven years since I was last at Swansea. While the summer of 2010 did not disappoint - I was starting a fixed term position in the CIA, my first appointment after completing my doctoral studies coupled with 9.5 weeks of glorious sunshine. The summer of 2017 was showing similarities. New and seasoned members of BSG were arriving on to what is known as the Bay Campus of Swansea University – a golden sea of sand-blasted buildings. Yet, as I see familiar faces and greetings are passed, something all too alike is resonating among the crowd, the campus has a feeling of been on a movie set or what some may imagine an American University campus to look like.

The Conference programme was jam packed and did not disappoint, many of the sessions split between the Great Hall and an adjacent building; BSG'ers manovering around like ants locating fresh honey, darting from room to the next. Across the conference there were many sessions surrounding the themes of environment, social and supportive relationships, participation and inclusive, cognition, dementia, cultural gerontology, health and social care, the arts and minority and diverse pop-

ulations. With this kind of line up, it was bound to be a great academic conference.

The social calendar of the conference was not a disappointment either. A BBQ was the order of the first night, held in front of the Great Hall, overlooking the beach and sea, with clear yet contrasting visibility between Port Talbot and the Mumbles. The BBQ saw many sitting on rocks, grass and enjoying the music and company, while some engaged in providing entertainment with assistance from Circus Eruption. Throughout the evening, there was a sense of free spirit, laughter, old friends and new one's coming together. I have heard over the years BSG been described as a family and the first evening certainly had the ingredients for this description.

While day two, the ants were back moving across from building to building, hiding in the shade or running along the beach, another jam packed day lay ahead, darting from room to room, standing by their posters or attending the AGM. While the Conference dinner which was held in the Great Hall with music supplied by Swansea U3A Ukulele Big Band followed by a DJ who supplied beats and tones from across the decades – which allowed many of us to 'spin the decks' and throw some shapes out on the dance floor. Another evening comprising of several great ingredients, saw the seasoned pilgrims and newbies alike come together, after exchanging positive conversations about what to do next – a publication, grant application, doctoral work or networking. By this point in the evening, it was clear the annual pilgrimage to the BSG conference was a success, comprising of so many positive vibes.



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### Elenyd Whitfield,

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The conference in Swansea was the third annual BSG conference that I had attended, and it was once again an enlivening and invigorating experience. Getting together with a community of other gerontologists from across the country and beyond is particularly important for PhD students like myself, who can sometimes feel quite isolated in their research interests at their home universities.

Attending the BSG conference allows the exchanging of ideas and perspectives and I always leave with replenished enthusiasm for my own work. It also gave me the opportunity to again present work from my research on 'choice', identity, and life story narratives, in a friendly and supportive atmosphere, and to build and maintain networks with other gerontologists.

As in previous years, there was a very wide-ranging programme of presentations, covering all aspects of current research in gerontology; from life story research involving the public exhibition of participants' self-curated personal objects, to design concerns for care homes and discussions of dementia-friendly colour-schemes. I particularly enjoyed seeing Chris Gilleard discussing the problematic nature of the concept of 'ageism', with the suggestion that we instead interpret discourses around ageing as overlapping parts of the 'social imaginary'. I also very much enjoyed Amanda Grenier discussing our shared understandings of 'frailty', in which she contextualised representations of 'frailty' as a process of ageing in the context of wider social and economic models such as Judith Butler's work on precarity.

The keynote speech that rounded off the confer-

ence, in which Alison O'Connor and Karin Diamond spoke of their work with groups of older people (including those with dementia) in creating life story theatre, was incredibly moving. The talk included footage of workshops and performances; some participants had been involved for several years, and they reflected on the confidence that they had developed during that time and the therapeutic effect that transforming difficult experiences into art had had on their lives. Alison and Karin also spoke of taking their workshop to care homes to work with patients, and reflected on the power this had to give dementia patients access to their former selves and to ameliorate their symptoms.

The speech by Beti George during the Gala Dinner, speaking on the experience of living and coping with the progression of her late husband's dementia was similarly moving and inspiring. The after-dinner entertainment by The University of the Third Age Ukulele Big Band was a great (and very appropriate) choice, and the audience enjoyed singing along. Again, this was of particular interest to me as part of my research sample was recruited from a U3A group, therefore I am interested in the range of activities and clubs associated with this organisation that meet across the country.

The proximity of the events to each other and to the accommodation made the conference easy to navigate and helped to make the experience more relaxing, and it all felt very well organised by the host university. Also, the vegan food that was provided was delicious!



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### BSG-by-the-Sea

Nadine Thomas

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Set in beach-front Bay Campus of Swansea University, the British Society of Gerontology hosted its 46<sup>th</sup> annual conference between 5-7<sup>th</sup> July on the theme of “*Do Not Go Gentle*” – *Gerontology and a Good Old Age*. With Wales being the first country to have a strategy for older people, it seemed a fitting place for gerontologists of all ages and stages to get together, discuss and advance understanding.

Conferences, at their best, are opportunities to disseminate research, debate, build and strengthen collaborative networks, and re-charge batteries. I feel #bsg17 achieved all of these, not least because of the saturated academic programme and sunshine.

The three-day programme centred on eight cross-cutting research topics: environments of ageing, social and supportive relationships, participation and inclusion, cognition and dementia, cultural gerontology, health and social care, the arts and older people, and minority and diverse populations. These were addressed by researchers in over 200 oral presentations, 39 symposia, poster presentations, a photography exhibition entitled “*The Ageing of British Gerontology*”, and four keynote addresses by Prof. Dawn Brooker of the University of Worcester, Prof. Norah Keating of Alberta and Swansea University, and Alison O'Connor and Karin Diamond, Co-directors Re-live Theatre Company.

The conference opened with a lyrical welcome from the Music in Mind Choir, which set the tone of

#bsg17 as one that valued creative arts, as well as creative thinking. A plenary address by Prof. Dawn Brooker drew attention to the theory and practice of post-diagnostic support for people with dementia, providing an up-to-date critique of the evaluation evidence base in the UK. Within this presentation, and the others that followed over the course of the conference, it was striking just how diverse the research methods used in gerontology really are.



From the perspective of an early career researcher, the conference programme offered challenge in its breadth and pace of research presented. I was stretched by stand-alone presentations, such as Ian Shergold's (University of the West of England) presentation exploring the issue of mobility and ageing in anticipation of autonomous vehicles, or Ruth Abrams and colleagues (Kingston University) analysis of home care worker's experience of blurred boundaries in supporting people with dementia. Both were brilliant pieces of research in their own right, and brought home that no matter how familiar (or unfamiliar) the presentation title, gerontologists have



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## Conference Review

a shared curiosity that enables learning from one another, irrespective of how distinct the research fields might at first appear. Artist in residence, Eleanor Beer, represented this visually, which delegates could see and reflect on at the end of each day.

Arguably the most significant challenge set out during the conference was the need for a more critical stance in global ageing. In the closing plenary, Prof. Keating asserted the need to look (and perhaps struggle) to define community, household, neighbourhood and home, instead of adopting crude micro, meso and macro frameworks. In other words, to define health in terms of wellbeing and person-environment-fit, rather than the reduction of chronic conditions. The ecological approach outlined was stimulating, and refreshing on its focus on theory in a research world that, with the onrush of deadlines and emphasis on impact, is sometimes forgotten.

The success of #bsg17 was largely down to the fantastic job of the Swansea Organising Committee at the Centre for Innovative Ageing. With a lively programme of entertainment, and a pre-conference event nurturing a community of doctoral students (link here to post by Hayley Wright), the organising team and delegates facilitated a beach-filled festival of knowledge that could rival other summer plans.





Emma Richards, Psychology, Swansea University

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The Centre for Innovative Ageing at Swansea University hosted the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual British Society of Gerontology Conference in July 2017, at the amazing and state of the art Bay Campus in Swansea. “Do not go gentle” – Gerontology and a good old age, the title taken from the local poet Dylan Thomas’ famous poem “Do not go gentle into that good night”, the conference aimed to celebrate “the art of ageing” and it excelled in achieving this by welcoming delegates from across the globe, and showcasing inclusive research which improved the lives of older people through interaction and engagement.

The Emerging Researchers in Ageing (ERA) Pre conference was a one-day event, the day before the main conference. This was an excellent opportunity for professional development for new and emerging researchers that offered the chance to talk with and listen to peers, to share ideas and issues, and to practise presenting your research. This was a superb opportunity for reflection within a supportive environment.

Following from this were keynote speeches, symposia presentations, a wide range of conference sub themes, poster sessions, beach barbecue and the gala dinner; each and every aspect of the BSG conference 2017 at Swansea University was organised with precision.

The cognition and dementia sub theme was extremely interesting, covering topics from environmental issues, including research on care homes, hospitals and neighbourhoods; protective factors such as dementia health literacy, dementia technology such as wearable technology and multi sensory stimulation. Other topics included biological aspects of dementia and tests of cognitive functioning including tests for early diagnosis, which included various forms of dementia such as vascular dementia. Social aspects of dementia included research on

social networks, dementia cafes and experiences of dementia from a caring perspective. Other themes included ‘Environments of Ageing’, ‘Social & Supportive Relationships’, ‘Participation & Inclusion’, ‘Cultural Gerontology’, ‘Health & Social Care’, ‘The Arts & Older People’ and ‘Minority & Diverse Populations’. The wide range of sessions reflected a multi disciplinary and international field of research within gerontology.

The presentations fitted together well within a common theme of cognition and dementia, and the presenters were very professional, well prepared and presented their research in a clear and informative manner. The published abstracts allowed the audience to choose the presentations that interested them, the conference encouraged audience movement between different topics and themes. All presenters kept to timings that allowed this movement without disruptions to presenters and other audience members. Following presentations the audience were encouraged to ask questions about the presented research, questions were answered by the presenters in a professional but friendly approach often leading to others feeling confident to ask questions.

Getting involved in the social activities of the BSG conference is a must. It provided a fantastic opportunity for networking, in a friendly and non-threatening environment. The range of social activities organised at the BSG conference at Swansea University were spectacular, and provided the opportunity to enjoy with other members in a variety of settings, from a fun and light hearted circus event at the beach barbecue, to the formal gala dinner with table centre pieces hand made by older adults in the local community, and with a guest of honour speaker who had the attendees in tears and received the first ever standing ovation at a BSG conference.

A superb and well organised conference, with a vast range of topics to choose from set on a state of the art campus on the beach at Swansea University, “Do not go gentle” – the art of ageing, a prescription for all.





## Who's Who: Dr Amy Jenkins

Psychologist and Research Fellow,  
Swansea University Department of Psychology.

### Describe yourself in three words.

Passionate; curious; gritty

### How did you get here today (i.e. career/research)?

In my younger days academia and I were not a natural pairing. In 2003, I went through the clearing system and gained a place on an undergraduate degree in Psychology. Many people, including myself, would never have thought that I would go to University, thus this turning point was unexpected to say the least!

In my degree, I had gained a thirst for wanting to carve out a meaningful career path in this area that I found so incredibly interesting, psychology. On completion of my degree I decided to embark on a master's degree marrying up my love of psychology and sport, thus I completed my first MSc in Sport Psychology. It quickly materialised that this was not the career for me so after 8 months of traveling the world I decided to gain more clinical and research experience to figure out what career path in psychology I wanted to go down. Four years later I decided to do another MSc, this time in Neuropsychology, an area which I was especially passionate about.

I had gained clinical and research experience working across the lifespan from child and adolescent mental health, neurorehabilitation in brain injury, medical education, genetics and brain donation in dementia related research. After my

position co-ordinating the South Wales cognitive functioning and ageing project (CFAS) at the Centre of Innovative Ageing (CIA) in Swansea University I successfully gained a scholarship

position in the Department of Psychology to do my PhD. I completed my PhD in just under the years...the fastest and most challenging three years of my life! During those three years I secured funding from BRACE Alzheimer's research Bristol for a two-year personal fellowship position of which I am currently a third of the way through.

The path to where I am now has been bumpy, a lot of hard work, and has required incredible persistence at times. However, this I would not change because it has taught me the value of grit and perseverance in discovering a career pathway which I am so enthusiastic about.

### What's the best piece of advice you've received?

I will never forget that feeling of 'imposter syndrome' whilst doing my PhD...that I should not have been where I was and doing what I was



doing. It was pointed out to me one day that 'no one is the expert in everything'. I was not expected to be an expert in e.g. neurobiology or neurochemistry!?! Brilliant! This lowered my anxieties and gave me the confidence to follow the second part of her advice...to develop and draw on a team around me who are experts in their respective fields. As a result, multidisciplinary working and invaluable collaborations have been made.

**Who is or has been the most influential person in your career?**

There are tons! However, my PhD supervisor Professor Andrea Tales has been and still is a huge tower of support and an inspiration. Andrea has supported and guided me with ultimate patience and understanding on an academic and personal level. Also, she has given me the confidence to strive beyond what I ever thought possible. She is devoted and passionate about her research into dementia, and has facilitated a life changing period of my academic, personal and research pathway.

**What's the best book you've ever read?**

There are far too many to choose from and such different genres (e.g. The Shantaram by Gregory David Roberts and all Harry Potter books)! However, the most influential must be Paula Radcliffe's autobiography. Her strength and determination to succeed is incredibly admirable.

**Best or most influential paper you have read, you'd recommend to others to read?**

Again, there are far too many to choose from but if I was to highlight what has stood out for me it would be one by Sarah Lamb called 'Permanent personhood or meaningful decline? Toward a critical anthropology of successful ageing' (Journal

of Aging Studies 29 (2014) 41-52). I was recommended to read this paper when I started my PhD. It provided me with a much needed alternative and open minded view of what constitutes successful ageing.

However, I have to mention another influential paper which encapsulates my research area and provides a succinct and clear framework for future research. This paper is by Jessen et al. (2016) and is titled 'A conceptual framework for research on subjective cognitive decline in preclinical Alzheimer's disease' (Alzheimer's and Dementia 10 (2014) 844-852).

**What do you do when you are not doing ageing research?**

Spending time with my partner, family and friends, running, cycling or out walking. To completely relax I either read or watch a film.

**Best research project you have been involved with and why?**

I have been involved in numerous amazing projects (i.e. CFAS; Alzheimer's and Genetics; Brains for Dementia etc...)! My main PhD study has had the biggest influence on me because it highlighted the complexity and importance of my research area. I learnt a lot from this study and I am currently building on it within my fellowship research.

**What's the future for ageing research?**

I hope the future is collaborative, multidisciplinary and person centred. There needs to be more joined up working with e.g. psychology, biosciences, social sciences etc. My research area is complex and cannot be explained from the stance of only my discipline area. To work with other specialist areas is imperative to the successful management of future challenges we may face.



# JOIN THE BSG TODAY!

Ageing research is increasingly high profile, nationally and internationally.

Consequently, those in universities and in organisations working with older people, will benefit from joining the British Society of Gerontology. The Society gives members access to a multidisciplinary forum and network of like minded people dedicated to applying the knowledge gained through research and practice to improving quality of life in old age.



Membership of the BSG brings you into a community of academics and practitioners interested in a wide range of issues related to ageing. In particular, membership:

- Facilitates access to dynamic and up-to date debates about ageing and ageing studies - our members are involved in cutting edge research, policy and practice and are very willing to share their perspectives with you
- Members have access to a number of social media platforms – blog **Ageing Issues**; twitter account; YouTube channel **Ageing Bites**; LinkedIn Group
- Entitles you to significantly reduced rates at the Annual Conferences of the British Society of Gerontology
- Gives access to our vibrant group of Emerging Researchers in Ageing (ERA), which includes students, postdoctoral researchers and those established in their careers but new to field of ageing, who meet regularly to discuss research, policy and practice and support one another in their careers
- Access to our mailing list (BSGmail) to enable you to keep up-to-date about conferences, seminars, teaching courses, and research about ageing and ageing studies
- If you are a student, postdoctoral or unwaged member, you are entitled to apply for a conference bursary, for example, to cover costs to attend our annual conference
- Entitles you to substantially reduced subscription rates to the following peer reviewed journals: *Ageing and Society* and *Journal of Population Ageing*
- Provides you with access to all areas of the BSG website, including the Membership Directory and Members Only pages

## How can I join?

Visit the website and fill in the registration form online and we will do the rest!

[www.britishgerontology.org/join](http://www.britishgerontology.org/join)

