Charlotte Clark

Last updated: 17 June 2008

Charlotte Clark has been writing about local issues for the free Aberystwyth student magazine The Courier. From May 2008 she sent us a selection of these articles:

- Last of the student days...
- Drink and Dive: police drinking boundaries...
- Class cooking: are students capable?
- Celeb interview: adventures with Stuart Kershaw

• More of Aber's student life...
Drink and Dive

Last updated: 15 May 2008

Charlotte Clark has been writing about local issues for the free Aberystwyth student magazine The Courier. In May 2008 she sent us one of these articles about the police drinking boundary in Aber:

"Summer may be the ideal time for sitting outside and enjoying a few but many take this to the extreme. The Student Guild has in place a 'Don't Drink and Dive' scheme to warn students, particularly those not familiar with the town, about the dangers of drinking near to the sea.

Aberystwyth police force has recently brought into force a no drinking zone around the outside of the town which is to be known as the Booze Boundary. Police now have powers to remove and dispose of alcohol from those drinking in the seclusion zone which includes the beaches which have been designated areas of risk.

Although there have been no student deaths in four years, we are constantly reminded of the danger of the sea along this part of the coast, for example on February 4th this year locals were astounded when a Water spout (effectively a small tornado) hit the coast, luckily no damage was reported.

Between Aberystwyth and Borth the rip currents are the second strongest in the UK and can pull you out from 500m to four miles without you realising. If we combine this with the lack of inhibitions caused by drinking it is easy to see how people can be quickly swept out, and with the sea around an icy 6°C the risk of hypothermia is very high.

Hopefully this effort to prevent drinking on the beaches will also decrease the levels of beach pollution that have recently irritated Aber locals who in the past enjoyed the litter-free seashore.

The scheme is not new, a zone ban between June 2005 and May 2007 proved particularly successful at reducing drink-related violence and was praised by the home office in their 'Not in My Neighbourhood' scheme. Police appealed to the local Council, highlighting the need for such a proposal, particularly as the only solution to dealing with homeless drunks."

Article by Charlotte Clark. Also published in student magazine, The Courier.
Class Cooking

Last updated: 15 May 2008

Charlotte Clark has been writing about local issues for the free Aberystwyth student magazine The Courier. In May 2008 she sent us one of these articles about student cooking:

"When making dinner for the two of us yesterday a friend of mine reminded me that students 'don't just like pot-noodles', perhaps an obvious statement but one that made me think of all of the millions of 'easy-to-do' recipe books out there designed for students and people of university age who apparently need instructions to cook a boiled egg.

I'm not saying some of us don't; I recently taught a close friend of mine to make 'that eggie thing' as he called it (scrambled egg) and I have the utmost respect for him for wanting to tackle the hurdle that is learning to cook for oneself. In turn he taught me how to make stir-fry, not the hardest of dishes but one I hadn't grown up with.

I do however resent the fact that the media seems to think that students, having just been thrust from the bosom of their families, are completely incapable and have no knowledge about food whatsoever.

Those of us with televisions for example were probably terrified at the recent onslaught of Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fernly Whittingstall programmes on the horrific conditions chickens are kept in, like we didn't know. I think, however, many of you would consider joining the Facebook group, 'F*** off. Jamie Oliver. I'll eat what I want!!!'.

His attack on school-dinners didn't exactly make me want to stand and fight against the hoardes of mothers feeding their obese children more chips. If they don't want their kids to grow up healthy so be it, 'Let them eat cake!' as Marie Antoinette is rumoured not to have said.

At the end of the day we all know eating fatty things makes us fatter.. ooh revelation! And things with a million additives and un-natural ingredients can't be good. I myself, was taught the old addage 'everything in moderation' but like to add 'including moderation itself' after an emotional night out or a particularly dull lecture and what's wrong with that? It doesn't mean I'm completely incapable of feeding myself.

Shopping leaves us with a whole load of choices which are probably integral to one's political stance as a student. In some stores we have to choose, do we want the coffee which makes money for starving farmers in some far-off place; the yoghurt from a local company; chocolate that donates to charity or bananas from a sustainable grove? Can we even afford this on our forty quid a week or so food budget? But we know these options are out there, students tend to be quite well educated.
I think after the initial dip into student life that students, like chameleons learn to adapt quite well to their surroundings. Absorbing knowledge like a sponge you learn that you only have a certain amount of money and that home-brands are cheaper, (although you’re never going to find Tesco’s blue and white labels in Aber).

I was quite impressed to find that bags of Onions were 20p the other week in Lidl as well as seeing students (who I know to be the typically packet-food buying variety) purchasing them! Students do not just eat junk food! I remember one of the first pieces of multi-lingual material that I received from Aber uni was a tiny cookbook written by students, I recall it simply because it was shiny with nice pictures.

I acknowledge that no, we’re probably not given as much food education in schools as in the 'good old days' when most of these publishers seemed to have been around but we can cook damn good pasta dishes, roast dinners, anything with eggs, fried breakfasts, stir frys, salads, soups, various deserts and are usually damn good at mixing cocktails.

I urge you to remember this when you reach for the book you got at Christmas from Auntie Ethel, you know how to cook! Students are masters of improvisation, if we don’t have the tool for the job we find another way to do it.

The vast array of kitchen equipment parents provide for their children always surprises me, in our kitchen alone we have two garlic presses! Always useful in a garlic-based emergency. But what’s wrong with a) chopping it finely with a knife or b) using the side of bottle of WKD?

These times are what makes university a real experience, the collective memories of the time when we smashed open the bottle of champagne having lost the corkscrew. One revelation I recall from the first year was the re-invention of the cheese toasty, toast your bread, stick cheese in the middle, squish. Not that appealing, but nevertheless ingenious.

Like daytime programmes such as 'Jeremy Kyle' and 'Neighbours' anything with Nigella Lawson swooning over cupcakes goes down a treat with students that are that way inclined. She herself seems like a modern Marie Antoinette with her rich husband and seemingly bourgeois lifestyle, well, that of a TV cook.

Although it’s obvious from her programmes that her children don’t eat the sensual delights she concocts whilst flirting with the camera. Perhaps this emphasises how she relates food to sex so well in her shows, she could hardly lick cream from her fingers with her kids sitting across from her. Poor Stick thin, blonde little things, someone needs to give them a nice big plate of spag bol and a hunk of chocolate cake.

I think people are too naive, in this consumer society the 'incapable' student cook-book is something we too readily get sucked into buying but I think that we should remember what makes human beings so 'special' is the fact that we can adapt to our environment, we learn from one another in order to better ourselves and remember as Plato said, 'necessity is the mother of invention'."

Article by Charlotte Clark
• More of Charlotte's articles...
Drink and Dive

Last updated: 15 May 2008

Charlotte Clark has been writing about local issues for the free Aberystwyth student magazine The Courier. In May 2008 she sent us an interview she conducted with Stuart Kershaw:

"I met documentary maker Stuart Kershaw on a dull Aberystwyth morning, far removed from the situation he had become used to on his journey across the Atlantic, which had often included rowing in 40 plus degrees.

As we sat down to talk about his trip his enthusiastic attitude somewhat surprised me for a man who was recovering from just having spent over a month rowing 12 hours a day.

The crew of the French-built boat La Mondiale, landed in Port St Charles on Barbados 33 days, 7 hours and 30 minutes after leaving Gran Canaria, setting a new Guinness World Record.

This beat the previous record for crossing the Atlantic by several days which was set in 1992 by a group of French legionnaires.

The fourteen men Stuart shared the boat with worked in two hours shifts, and despite the amount they had to row, even managed to make another record on the trip of rowing 117 miles in 24 hours (Aberystwyth-Cardiff is a little over 100). Although he explained that he remembers the day well and the crew were tired that day and not particularly pushing for it.

Stuart explained how after a few days of extreme fatigue the men's bodies became more used to the sleeping hours and the cramped conditions ('you were constantly in physical contact with another man') were something they just had to accept.

Although being equipped for their needs, the men had about a metres space when they were rowing and could take very little with them. The toilet at the end of the boat was precarious as it made the men prey to sharks, who tend to follow waste trails.

On the journey they came across a Great White, shoals of fish jumping out of the water to escape shark attacks as well as very stormy sea conditions including 30ft swells. At one point the men were driven back by a three day storm which frustrated them immensely although Stuart pointed out it made for good recording.

Bearing this in mind he considered that it would have been possible to have made a greater world record if they'd had stronger trade winds but would only consider doing the crossing again if he was paid for it. The men's main focus was the 'Blue Ribbon Trophy'.
The men lived what Stuart described as 'gloop' a dehydrated mixture of sugar and hydrogenated fats which basically resembled Angel Delight, when he returned to shore his first meal was a BBQ with grilled fish, lasagne, steaks, proper meat burgers and he vividly recalls being handed a cold beer when he first disembarked. He also missed fresh food like vegetables and crusty baked bread, things that perhaps we take for granted.

When asked about his motivation Stuart replied that obviously other than making the documentary he had wanted to do something interesting and get away from the world, not worrying about things such as 'student loans payments'.

I asked him what his humblest moment was on the voyage and he explained that about two days in the crew became very aware of the challenge they had to conquer mother-nature and although he had trained in the gym six days a week and had been rowing on rivers he would have spent more time practicing on the sea itself.

The men, including men from the army, found their macho preconceptions were quickly crushed and even they found it difficult to wake up on time for their rowing shifts during the night. He also would have put on more fat beforehand.

Although Stuart only lost a stone himself one of his crew mates (nicknamed Tiny-little) lost half of his body-weight on the trip. Another strong motivation for Stuart was charity-work; through his trip he raised money for less well known charities such as the 'Brain and Spine Foundation' and a little-known charity based in India called 'Start' who helps female leprosy sufferers.

During his first year in Aber as a student Stuart ran the London Marathon raising around £500 for the 'Brain and Spine Foundation' but this was only half of the amount that he had hoped to procure and felt slightly indebted to them for accepting his donation graciously.

The crew sailed over Christmas although small presents had been packed for them by family. One such present was an engraved St Christopher which was lost on the voyage before Stuart even came to open them.

The sponsors provided clothing and kit for the crew but quickly all they came to wear, if anything, were sarongs, cotton boxers and hats. The crew's sun cream ran out a few days before the end of the trip so many had to cover up to avoid being burnt by the searing heat.

One small addition Stuart was able to bring was his ipod. Over the course of the journey he was able to listen to audio books and learn Italian. I asked whether any particular music stuck in his head and he recalled the 'Cruel Intentions' soundtrack which features a combination of bands like Placebo and The Verve.

When I asked what he missed most on the journey he mentioned the more obvious things like loved ones, family and also sex. Although he said the tiring schedule made them soon forget about it, and on his return made him feel slightly like 'I'm a eunuch'.

Stuart's film company started in Aber 'In The Dark
Productions' are showing the documentary made on the trip at the Henry Regatta and then hopefully it will be coming to our screens later in the year.

Originally called 'Blue Horizon' Stuart renamed the documentary after the less-pretentious name the Irish press had given the team 'Ocean's 14'. As for his next venture, Stuart is very keen to visit the South Pole and others in the crew were equally inspired including the captain who is interested in becoming the first man to row across every ocean.

Interviewing Stuart Kershaw was a great experience and I would like to wish him luck with his future ventures."

Article by Charlotte Clark. Also published in student magazine, The Courier.

- More of Charlotte's articles...
Last days...

Last updated: 16 June 2008

Charlotte Clark has been writing about local issues for the free Aberystwyth student magazine The Courier. In June 2008 she sent us a blog about her last days as a student in Aber:

"In my final weeks at University I decided it was time to start making further investigations into the job market. With no decisive career choices up until now I chose to remain in Aberystwyth for up to a year to work and generally enhance my CV.

I began by talking to the job centre up at the University who suggested several websites which I signed up to. I found the people working there really easy to deal with and attuned to my needs as a student.

My next moves were to look at the local Cambrian News and I began to collect magazines in the areas I was interested in eventually working. Then I began to sort through my CV and wrote a general cover letter.

After seeing so many jobs advertised in windows in town I printed off 7 or so copies and attacked with job hunting venom. Most of the jobs seemed to be part-time but my thoughts were that if I could get a foot in the door of a company I could either move up or if a better opportunity came along, move on.

The second part of my challenge was to find a place to live for the year. I had been searching with a close friend for accommodation for some time but living with him was restricted by his plans to take a PGCE in the coming year.

I found that private and student sector housing was often separated by lettings companies due to insurance and council tax issues. So I had to find new people to live with. I also had problems with several letting agencies whose original claims about properties were almost deceptive.

The continued failure was at first quite distressing as I found myself making plans for new flats and then not being able to follow through. I was also struggling with inner demons wanting to start out on my own and keep the independence I'd enjoyed during uni.

May 15 2008

Today was another difficult day in the hunt for a house. I thought I'd found some ex uni students who are willing to put up with me for the six months they're here and a house that was perfect.

However, when I arrived at the estate agents all happy-go-lucky I was quickly shot down by the fact that the house I like on Upper Portland Street wasn't available for three
people, despite having single and double beds.

The disappointment put me into quite a negative mood and I wanted to cry 'please I’m gonna be homeless' at the proprietor. I felt slightly better after a trip to the nearest bakery and a tearful call to my boyfriend.

Although he suggested some other agencies he’d found online, apparently the houses advertised had already been ‘promised’ to other clients. This evening I talked to one of my potential housemates about viewing a property tomorrow which is on the sea-front so we’ll have to see how that goes. Hopefully things will be looking up.

May 16 2008

It's a miserable, rainy May morning when we head down to - for the viewing and with my current luck I'm hardly surprised when we've got the wrong time and for the sake of the current occupants the agent refuses to take us without giving them advanced warning.

Talking to the agent we find an even nicer place and agree to see them both on Monday during my potential housemates lunch break from his new job. Afterwards we walked around the maze of letting agents hidden in the back streets of Aber. We talked to one woman who seemed to think that Bow Street is in the centre of the town, not the greatest start. After a quick wander we had another look for job advertisements. I began wishing I'd brought my pile of CV copies with me.

Too many places seemed to have 28hrs a week, the wages from which wouldn't be enough to live off. A visit to the job centre proved fruitful and left me with several leads plus the touch-screen machines entertained me.

May 17 2008

This morning I received a rejection for a secretary's job at a Solicitors. It humoured me slightly that the new secretary would have probably been in charge of sending the rejection. I spent this afternoon working on one important job application that I was particularly interested in.

I’ve filled in so many of that it was starting to get monotonous but this is more interesting. I also cut out my articles printed in student magazine 'The Courier' to begin creating a portfolio of work.

Scanning these into the computer was a task and a half, taking at least an hour of crouching over the printer/scanner amongst my packing trying to figure out why it couldn't recognise the articles. After juggling with several Publishing programmes I managed to insert my copies into a PowerPoint slideshow.

When I sent off my required CV and covering letter I wondered whether samples of my work would stand as better evidence of my ability as a writer. Out with my friends tonight I was struck by the idea that University was as good as over.

May 18 2008
Today was a rather lazy Sunday. I met my boyfriend's parents and had a lovely meal at The Carvery on the seashore. I packed up a lot of his belongings to send back, slowly he seems to be moving away from Aber in mind as well as physically but I'm glad he seems to be finding it easy to move on.

This evening I wrote another cover letter and sent off another CV on my email. Afterwards I did a little writing and washed most of my clothes to pack. For some reason PJM student halls have scheduled an inspection, full-house none-the-less on the final week of exams.

Part of tomorrow is evidently going to be spent craftily shoving things into boxes in my wardrobe which they can't open. I'm going to enjoy having nice clean clothes this week and I feel more prepared for my visit to my parents on Thursday.

Right now I'm excited about seeing my potential new house tomorrow and seeing my family next week as I haven't had chance since Christmas.

May 19 2008

The house, well flat, was absolutely gorgeous. We arrived to our meeting during R's lunch break as we had planned. Although I must say I dislike the way estate agents often drive you to appointments, doesn't seem safe to me.

The 'four-person' flat description was deceptive though, the fourth consisted of a bed in the dining room/lounge area. However, despite this I felt safe and it was beautiful and only a year old.

If we could wait an extra month then it would be perfect I'd even get my own ensuite, but where could we all stay for the next month? R agreed to look at a bed-sit owned by the agency which he could inhabit for the time being, he'll go and see it tomorrow.

I guess I'd just have to store my things and go home. I also filled in a few additional job forms. The stress really is starting to affect me. I know I have to stay positive but sometimes it's just so tricky.

May 20 2008

I felt so ill this morning I ended up wasting most of the day as I didn't feel up to much more than lying in bed, and of course asking my boyfriend to fetch me chocolate and things (bless him he's so lovely).

R did call though, the bed-sit was horrible but he's found a few alternatives, moving into the room of a friend who's moving to Liverpool or a different house in Llanbadarn.

May 21 2008

R's visiting the house in Llanbadarn tomorrow when unfortunately I won't be around but my boyfriend P said he'd go to the viewing for me. I'm really worried that it's not going to be sorted out in time as there's not long left.

We took a trip to Morrison's on the bus to get groceries and on the way back I spotted the Llanbadarn property I was
possibly going to be renting, frankly it looked rather run-
down.

May 22 2008

I was up to catch the early train this morning, feeling a little worse for wear. Packed up, I walked down the hill thinking that this was going to be a very hot, long day. I arrived at the station early, which is my habit, I like to be punctual, which is to say I worry about missing things.

I picked up my tickets from the machine on the station, they're great but I always wonder why they charge me extra to do it. The prices of food on the train always seems ludicrous to me so I was glad to be able to wander across to Somerfield to buy myself a bottle of water.

When I got on the train I realised I'd made the mother of all mistakes, I sat next to a family with a toddler, perfect for half nine in the morning. I got a call from P- while I was on the train and thankfully it wasn't the one I'd thought it was and they'd decided to take the bungalow as it was 'perfect'. Made my day to have something settled.

My connections were fine for once, I spent some time sleeping on the train which is unusual for me and ate my packed lunch. No matter how sophisticated I make it, I always feel like a child on the train with my huge bag, my baggy jumper and my packed lunch.

I surprised my mum with my phone-call but luckily she was able to come and pick me up from the station. We spent the remainder of the afternoon at my Nan's house helping to pack.

May 26 2008

After a long weekend with a stressful but successful move I boarded the train home, well Aberystwyth. Since living there I've always felt more at home there than.. well.. at home. Trust me to book to travel on a bank holiday, Dad ended up driving me to the middle of London to catch my connection.

The Aberystwyth train was cancelled at Birmingham sending me on a stressful dash to catch the train at Wolverhampton. I still don't see why British train companies are so appalling, how can we be expected to cut down on using cars if they can't make travelling by train any more punctual?

May 30 2008

Several days have passed since I last wrote, as the time has been filled with things that students do towards the end of a term, saying goodbye to people, organising things for next year, especially packing and I'm still trying to find a job.

I was making my boyfriend tea this evening, (I love cooking) and he came in to tell me that there was a problem with the house and we couldn't move in this weekend. They needed more references which was going to take more time, but I was going to be left homeless.

For some reason the university wasn't allowing students to stay after the deadline. We tried to not let it ruin our final night of uni life and went out, after P- asked if it would be alright for me to stay with his family.
I’m so grateful to have him around it's untrue. I had a good night and although I was saying goodbye, somehow I didn't feel all that sad about leaving, just relieved that I could start my life finally.

**May 31 2008**

Today I had to be up really early to pack all of my things after yesterday's revelation. R - was kind enough to pick everything up for me in order to store it until we could move in.

Once again I was last to leave and had to abandon somewhat a messy house which I wouldn't have time to clean, never leave last unless you love cleaning with a passion. I felt bad for my housemates but I don't see it as my responsibility to clean up what other people have left, I'd prefer to take the fine.

Subsequently we stayed at P-'s house for two weeks. The morning we were finally supposed to move in the house fell through. The estate agents had promised we could sign the contract for six months but the owner wanted a tenant for twelve, so my Mum took me back to Aber to collect my things and then we came home.

So now I’m looking for work down here, my dream of living in Aber, over for the time being. It's somewhere I want to return to though, there's something beautifully addictive about the place."

Article by Charlotte Clark.

- More of Charlotte’s Aber stories...