

Cymdeithas Hanesyddol Tyddewi a Phebidiog St Davids and Dewisland Historical Society

Ramsey Island and Beyond – a life on the water Ffion Rees

Daughter of Non, Cathedral Librarian, Ffion grew up beside the sea in St Davids and developed a natural affinity with the ever-changing moods of the sea and the islands it surrounds. After completing a degree in German and Celtic Studies at Aberdeen University she returned to her roots in Pembrokeshire ... because the sea was in her blood!



Ffion has worked the waters around Ramsey Sound for over 20 years and has also been a member of the St David's lifeboat crew for over 10 years, is a WISE accredited skipper, a powerboat instructor, a qualified Marine Mammal Observer and an author. At Falcon Boats, they share their

love and passion for the Pembrokeshire coastline, with a sense of kinship with the land. The crews know every nook and cranny of the coast, every rock where seals haul out to bask in the sun, where the porpoise feed at the turn of the tide and every emerald cave. With every trip, they hope to impart their love and connection with the landscape to all on board.

Whilst having no direct family connection to Ramsey (Ffion was born in North Wales) she has developed a close affinity with Pembrokeshire's coastline. Ramsey, as a name, may be of Norse origin ('Hraven'/ Raven's 'ey' or island) or Old English 'ramsa' (wild garlic). More commonly it is known as Ynys Dewi (or St David's Island) and myths refer to the burial place of 20,000 saints. Earliest memories of Ramsey date from the time the island was owned by the Allpress family and memories of 'wild camping', sleeping in the heather with best friend Jemma (grand-daughter of the original owners) on their 'island adventure' and the family often made the trip across the Sound to visit the island. Her love of the islands and the sea was encouraged by her father who would take her fishing in his small dory, during school holidays, helping him haul in lobster and crab pots. This later evolved into helping her father by crewing on wildlife trips round the islands ... leading to a greater understanding of the island's history and wildlife as well as the many moods of its weather. To manage sharing the delights safely with visitors she has developed an understanding of the changeable weather around the coastline as well as the seasonal changes that take place bringing with them the many, and varied, seabirds that inhabit the coastal margins – or simply visit the islands. Crucial in attracting the seabirds are the strong currents and exposed locations which provide for both food and sanctuary.

Early references are to Ynys Tyfanog – after St Tyfanog, an early Celtic Saint, whose chapel was on the island. The chapel is associated with records of 'long-cist' graves (common C5th – C11th). Habitation on the island dates back over 4000 years, with field patterns of possible Bronze Age. The bishops of St Davids also had land holdings on the island until it was sold as late as 1904 to Wynford Philipps, Lord St Davids. In the C6th Justinian, one of St David's monks, disapproved of the 'lax' ways of the monastery



and moved Ramsey - until his followers mutinied and cut off his head and he simply walked back to the mainland (head under arm)! It is now in the ownership of the R.S.P.B. and run as a bird preserve – renown as a breeding site for many nationally rare birds and a SPA (Special Protection Area) and Pembrokeshire Marine SAC (Special Area for Conservation) as well as SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

For more read "Ramsey Island and beyond – a life on the water by Ffion Rees; Graffeg 2017)