

COMING EVENTS

Friday, December 2: Mr Norman Williams, President of the Society, will give the first Maud Gunter Memorial lecture, taking as his theme the history of the granting of the freedom of Cowbridge. Coffee and mince pies during this meeting.

Friday, January 6 : Folk Customs - Dr Richard Shilton, Squire of the Cardiff Morris Men

Advance Notice: Charter Day will be celebrated in the Town Hall at 8p.m. on Saturday, March 18.

TAKE TWO TABLETS

Who was drowned after 'Falling from aloft on the barque Penrhyn Castle off Cape Horn in 1899' - and where was his home in Cowbridge? Or who was drowned from 'HM Brig Jasper in Plymouth Sound in 1817', and what was his connection with the Grammar School? If you join a group of us soon to be working on the memorials in Cowbridge Church, you will not only find the answers to these questions, but also help to do some vital research in recording these memorials and establishing pedigrees and family trees of many important Cowbridge families.

Mrs Patricia Moore explained in - the October meeting the details of such a project which she had initiated in Penmark - how she checked the findings with the diaries of David Jones of Wallington, written in the 1880's - and how well received was the exhibition of the finished work. She promised to try to marry our findings with any documentary information.

Interested? See Mrs Yvonne Weeding for further details.

COMMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS, i.e. comments on this newsletter, and contributions for future ones, to Jeff Alden, please. We'll even accept For Sale and Wanted ads, as long as they are to do with local history.

OFFICERS (as elected in the A.G.M)

Chairman: Mrs Yvonne Weeding, C 2878
 Secretary: Mr John Miles, Cardiff 36490
 Treasurer: Dr Iolo Griffith, C 5408
 Programme Secretary: Mrs Gwynneth Keay, C 2879
 Excursions Secretary : Mrs Mary Collins, C 3662
 Publicity: Mr Jeff Alden, C 3373
 Committee: Mrs A. Arnott, Mr D. Busher, Mrs N. Ginn, Mr A. Jones, Mrs V. Whythe

MOORE NEWS

"No other town in the three Glamorgans has retained its historic character".
 "Happily the Victorian age didn't hit Cowbridge, and it has kept its eighteenth century appearance".
 "In the last few years, some jarring notes have been introduced".

These are all quotations from Mrs Patricia Moore who addressed the Society during the October meeting. She was very concerned about recent changes in Cowbridge, in details as well as in major reconstructions and destructions, and suggested that the Building Group should create a file, listing good and bad points in every house in the High Street, Eastgate and Westgate. She also suggested a letter to every house from the society, asking householders to do all they can to retain the good features - and to try to replace any monstrosities.

Comments to Mr John Miles or Dr Iolo Griffith, please.

SPREAD EAGLE

A note to add to the article by two sixth-formers in the latest Intercom: some fragments of tiles found on a wall in the Eagle Stores have been identified by the Museum as being Bristol Delft, about 1750. Can anyone jog my memory about a tale concerning the existence of tiles there (around the fireplaces perhaps?)

USK EXCURSION.

The Society's "picnic outing" took place on Sunday, September 4th, and about thirty members drove in convoy to Usk Castle. There we were shown around by Mr Humphreys, whose family have lived in the Castle House - which is built into the curtain wall alongside the Gate House - for many generations.

The Castle, although a designated building, has not been taken over by the D. o. E., and therefore the family have no financial help in conserving and restoring it, but Mr Humphreys said that the creeper-covered walls enchanted American tourists. He also told us that the last battle fought in the area ended in the defeat of Owen Glyndwr, and gazing down from the wall between the two comparatively small towers to the river and town below, looking over the tops of 60 foot trees, one realised how impregnable the castle must have been.

During some renovations, a small chapel was discovered, and has now been completely dug out and restored. A service is held there once a year.

We wandered around the extensive gardens, and then had our picnic in an adjoining field until a light shower sent us scurrying back to our cars, and we then drove down to the priory. Unfortunately, we were only able to wander, around the outside of this fascinating building that David and Bronwen Peterson are restoring, as they were unable to be there to show us around, and explain what they hope to do. They obviously have a lifetime's work ahead of them.

M. C.

GREAT HOUSE, ABERTHIN.

About 25 members of the Buildings Group visited Great House, Aberthin on Sunday, October 23rd, by kind permission of Major and Mrs L.S.J. Bailey.

After a short talk by Major Bailey we examined the external features of the building - the three gables; the square-topped windows, with dripstones of thick roofing stones; the proportions of the windows, with diminishing width at the first storey, and even more so at the second; and the tops of windows exposed at ground level disclosing the existence of cellars (now sadly filled in). The sundial over the porch is a skilfully carved replacement of the original which fell off during the last war when a bomb fell on Stalling Down.

Inside, noteworthy features were the large fireplace and stone oven in the kitchen, the dairy - now converted into a dining room, the 'squint' windows, the massive staircase and the furniture which so well reflected the character of the house.

A most pleasant afternoon ended with refreshments, kindly provided by Mrs Bailey. We thank Major and Mrs Bailey for all that they did to make the afternoon a success.

W E L S H S T D O N A T S D I G

A Bronze Age round barrow was excavated in August of this year by the Department of Archaeology of U.C. Cardiff and the Cardiff Archaeology Society. The barrow - between Welsh St Donats and Tair Onen - was made up of two circular stone walls surrounding a central turf mound. The finds included six human burials, a bronze dagger and bronze awl, parts of seven pottery vessels, and many flint implements.

(We hope, from time to time, to publish in the newsletter summaries of some of our monthly lectures. Mr T. Alun Davies, our October speaker, has kindly given his permission for us to publish this account of his talk. Any errors of interpretation are of course mine. J.A.)

FURNITURE IN WALES.

Mr T. Alun Davies, Assistant Keeper,
Welsh Folk Museum.

Lecture given on 7 October 1977

In the Middle Ages, there were great similarities in the pattern of furniture throughout Europe, but the sixteenth century saw the emergence of national styles. Wales was especially influenced by England: wealthy Welshmen liked to imitate the fashions of the court, country craftsmen went to English towns and returned to Wales with ideas of new furniture styles, and the drovers were a potent influence in spreading knowledge. So, in the study of Welsh furniture, a recurring theme is the dissemination of ideas, and their adaptation by local craftsmen.

One aspect of this adaptation was practically forced upon the craftsmen - mahogany and walnut were much used for daintier furniture in England, but were very expensive to import into Wales, and so local oak and ash were used (though there are examples of oak being stained with oxblood to simulate mahogany). In addition, rural Wales tended to demand sturdier, more practical items than the most fashionable types available in English towns.

There were, of course, no large Welsh towns, and no Welsh centres of fashion in Tudor and Stuart times. Wales was remote, rural and conservative: many pieces of furniture were repeated time and again by the Welsh craftsmen, and so we see a considerable time-lag between England and Wales - not only in Tudor times, but even in the nineteenth century. For example, Chippendale-type furniture, based on his catalogues and instruction books, was still being made in Wales between 30 and 100 years after its heyday in England.

* * * * *

Few items have survived from Mediaeval Welsh houses, in which the furniture consisted of chests, beds, tables and very little else. From about the fifteenth century, however, we can trace the development of the chest not only as a piece of furniture but also as the fore-runner of other types of furniture. A few examples remain of the earliest type of chest, hollowed out of a tree trunk, which stood directly on the earth floor, and which would not have been made by a full-time craftsman. By early Tudor times, chests were craftsman-made, and raised off the floor; by Henry VIII's time they were frequently intricately carved; and by the seventeenth century they were lighter, more portable, and panelled. The Mile Chest with two drawers underneath was the precursor of the chest of drawers, which in turn led to the development of the Tallboy (in effect, a chest on a stand).

From the dresser of the Mediaeval period came another sequence of furniture types. It was first replaced by the Buffet or Court Cupboard (i.e. a short board for cups) - at first open, then with the sides and back added. The court cupboard was discarded in English towns in the seventeenth century, but was still being used at that time in Welsh farmhouses. From this came the Cwpwrdd Deuddarn, the two-piece cupboard, and then the Cwpwrdd Tridarn, the three-piece cupboard, which included a shelf to display pewter (and which is the only piece of furniture typical of Wales alone).

The dresser returned (in a new form) from Holland at the end of the seventeenth century. Originally, a dresser was a long chest on which food was dressed, but soon a superstructure was introduced for the same

reason as with the tridarn - to display pewter or plates, and so brighten up a room. The dresser is however not solely a Welsh item of furniture, but more were made here per head of population than anywhere else, and in England the dresser was replaced by the mahogany sideboard in the eighteenth century.

Two distinctive regional types developed in Wales: roughly north of a line from Harlech through Bala to Wrexham the dresser consisted of cupboards to floor level, with drawers above, and a backed superstructure while roughly south of a line from Lampeter to Builth the dresser was open below the drawers, with no backing to the shelves. Mid-Wales saw many variations on these two types. Oak and ash were the main woods used, until the demands for shipbuilding, especially in the Napoleonic Wars, reduced the amount of hardwoods available. After this pine was much more widely used.

Thus Welsh furniture makers, starting off with ideas brought in from England and elsewhere, adapted these ideas to suit local needs and local timbers. Our remoteness from centres of fashion, and the conservatism of rural Wales led not only to a time-lag between English and Welsh furniture, but also to the development of some original pieces, and to regional specialisation within Wales.