

# folk life

## NEWSLETTER

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THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE, MUCKROSS. ©TODDY DOYLE

THE SOCIETY FOR FOLK LIFE STUDIES

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2014 Killarney, Republic of Ireland: 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> September 2014

- \* *50 years of Muckross House*
- \* *The Irish kitchen*
- \* *Landscape interpretation*

One of the key supporters of the Society has been the staff and trustees of Muckross House and Traditional Farms in Killarney, Republic of Ireland. As the trust that both preserved this Victorian mansion and developed its open-air museum was established in 1964, it seems very fitting that this year's conference returns to Killarney to reflect on the work of this famous heritage attraction over its first half century.

With so much of the site devoted to the interpretation of rural domestic life, a second theme for the conference will be the Irish kitchen and its food. Muckross also plays an important part within the work of the Killarney National Park. The third theme of the conference is Landscape Interpretation and the main excursion will explore a number of sites within the national park.

The conference sessions will be held in the Lake Hotel, near Muckross House ([www.lakehotelkillarney.com](http://www.lakehotelkillarney.com)). Built in 1820, the core of the present hotel still exhibits the original elegant lounges with log fires. Later extended and luxuriously appointed, the hotel has recently been refurbished, but has kept its old-world charm.

If you wish to attend this year's conference, please complete the enclosed application form and send it,



with a non-returnable deposit of £75, to the Conference Secretary (Steph Mastoris) at: National Waterfront Museum, Maritime Quarter, Oystermouth Road, Swansea, SA1 3RD, Wales.

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### **A free student place at the 2014 conference**

As usual the Society is offering a free place at its annual conference to a student in full-time education. All fees and the cost of bookable meals will be included, but the person attending will have to pay for his or her own travel. To be considered for this opportunity, a person must not have attended the annual conference before. A short review of the conference will be required from the successful applicant.

Applications for this free place should be made to the Conference Secretary, Steph Mastoris ([steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk)), by the end of May.

### **2015 Conference at the Black Country Living Museum**

The society's conference next year will be hosted by the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, West Midlands, England. The conference will run from the evening of Thursday 10th September until lunch-time on Sunday 13th September 2015. Accommodation close to the museum is currently being investigated and the overall fee for attendance has yet to be calculated.

The Museum (<http://www.bclm.co.uk/>) first opened to the public 36 years ago and is now the UK's third most-visited open-air museum, welcoming more than 250,000 visitors through its gates each year. In 2010 the Museum opened its £10 million development of the 'Old Birmingham Road, a street set in the 1930s. Historically the Black Country played a vital role in the nation's industrial history. This was the world's first industrial landscape and one of the most intensely industrialised regions of the UK. The Museum preserves a section of the Black Country's industrial landscape, including two mine shafts,

limekilns and a canal arm. The Museum has relocated buildings into a canalside village, which have been drawn from across the many small towns of the region. Each house, shop and workshop has been filled with collections, from sad irons to nails, that would have been seen in situ from the 1800s to 1940s.

The Museum's Designated Collections also include sixteen narrow boats, a collection of commercial vehicles, motorcars and motorcycles made in the Black Country; there is also a tramway and the longest operational trolley bus route in Britain.

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### **Study Day 2013**

#### **Visit to Ryedale Folk Museum, Hutton-le-hole, North Yorkshire**

A lovely sunny day on the 15<sup>th</sup> June saw a small but perfectly formed group of Folk Life Studies members converge upon the Ryedale Folk Museum for a joint study day with the Regional Furniture Society (RFS) and Metal Ware Society. It was a special pleasure when we found old friend John Gall there on arrival, looking extremely fit and well in retirement. If you have never visited this little jewel in North Yorkshire, make plans to go as soon as you can. (<http://www.ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk/>)

We were all made very welcome by Polly Legg of the RFS and also took the opportunity of lunch and tea breaks to make friends with other members. The morning session comprised more old friends in the form of Peter Brears and Bernard (Bill) Cotton, whom many will remember from a long-ago conference on the Isle of Man. Peter's presentation entitled 'Culture of the North York Moors' was as fascinating and wide-ranging as one would expect, full of information and well observed comments. Bill Cotton had some interesting pieces for us to look at (including a quiz!) as well as speaking about his research processes and the huge contribution to his work provided by his wife, also present, who was able to add to the proceedings.

A convivial lunch at the Crown next door was followed by a visit to the new gallery showing The Richard and Edward Harrison Collection of folk art, guided by Edward Harrison, who had many tales to tell about amassing this completely amazing collection rivalling (and surpassing) many museum collections which have taken many more years to gather together.

The day ended with tea and cakes in sunshine before a drive home (in the congenial company of Linda Ballard) over the north Yorkshire moors. Perfect.

**Christine Stevens**

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### **Conference 2013**

The conference was opened by President Eddie Cass who welcomed everyone to the Welsh spa town of Llandrindod Wells.

#### **Papers**

#### **Radnorshire – Wales' forgotten county Dai Hawkins**

Over the years I have driven through the former county of Radnorshire hundreds of times. I'm afraid that it has tended to be somewhere through which I hurry on my way north or south, with an occasional pit-stop to eat at the 'Metropole' in Llandrindod or 'Evans' Plaice', Rhaeadr's excellent chippy! However, this fascinating lecture by Dai Hawkins, the opening lecture of our 2013 conference, made me realise what I have been passing and what I have been missing – an eye-opener indeed!

The area is today overwhelmingly English in speech, which is perhaps not surprising bearing in mind its lengthy eastern boundary with Shropshire and Herefordshire. Nevertheless, parts of the former county remain very remote to this day, areas in which one might think that the Welsh language might have survived. Dai's address on the history of the county was based to a considerable degree on his

pioneering studies of the decline of Welsh in the county, taking us back to the rich seams of information that are revealed in medieval Welsh poetry from the area. Using clever power-point effects, we learnt of the late medieval poet from the area who sang an ode to the benefits imparted by his glasses (for seeing, not drinking!) and we also learnt of the importance of Hergest Court, right on Offa's Dyke, as the home for many centuries of what are now some of the most treasured Welsh-language manuscripts in the National Library. Philologist as well as historian, Dai also made some convincing points about the probable Welsh dialect of the area, producing evidence from poetry and place names to argue that it was *y Wenhwyseg*, the now little-spoken Welsh of south-east Wales, that could once be heard in the area.

Fascinating evidence regarding the decline of the Welsh language in one of its last strongholds in the county was provided by accounts of an early nineteenth century disagreement over the language of worship in the Congregationalist chapel in Rhaeadr. The older members wished to continue to worship in Welsh, whereas the younger members considered the language an anachronism which should be laid aside at the earliest opportunity. The younger pro-English faction eventually won the day in the 1840s, but Dai ended on a hopeful note, pointing out that Rhaeadr's primary school now has a flourishing Welsh language stream, as do most of the area's larger primary schools.

I will never pass through Radnorshire again without thinking of Dai's lecture, the fascinating figures from the past he recalled and the many stunning locations in the county which he illustrated. On my travels along the A470 and the A483 in the future, I most definitely intend to stop and explore more of this fascinating part of Wales. *Diolch yn fawr* (thank you very much) Dai for a truly revelatory paper!

**David Jenkins.**

## **An Introduction to the Metropole Hotel and its History**

**Justin Baird-Murray**

Justin's family has owned the hotel for well over a hundred years and his paper gave us a fascinating introduction to the story of its growth from the late nineteenth century to the present.

Originally, the hotel was a much more modest establishment, the Bridge Inn, opened in 1896. Its growth was inextricably linked with that of the town, starting with the coming of the railway in 1865 which stimulated visits to the Rock Spa at a time when such cures were considered essential to the health of those able to afford such treatment. The growth of the hotel in size and facilities coincided with the growth of Llandrindod and by 1909 the Metropole had 240 bedrooms, each with its own fireplace, but the occupants had to share the eighteen bathrooms. A decline was inevitable and brought about by a combination of factors; the loss of interest in spa cures, competition from spas in mainland Europe; and, probably, the 1914-18 war.

The hotel continued its efforts to meet the needs of inter-war tourists who came for the scenery rather than the spa. The family maintained their efforts to enhance the services of the hotel, improving rooms and reducing their number. A new period of relative prosperity was occasioned following Welsh devolution when the geographical location of Llandrindod between north and south Wales made the town an ideal location for conferences. Today, the hotel is a major stopping-off point for coach parties visiting that part of Wales and the border area.

This conference could not have chosen a better hotel for its base. It has all the facilities visitors have come to expect, a fine restaurant; an excellent bar and brasserie; a swimming pool and a gym. Moreover, as opposed to the situation in 1909, each bedroom is en-suite. We could not have been better served by the family and staff who were determined that guests had an enjoyable stay. Justin's talk was a very welcome introduction to a hotel to which Sheila and I would willingly return.

**Eddie Cass**

## **Aspects of the Water Industry in Wales** **Owen Roberts**

Dr Roberts traced the story of the human consumption of Welsh water from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, looking particularly at the politics and promotion of Welsh water. He emphasised how the social, political and cultural view of what constituted clean, pure water changed over time.

Llandrindod developed as a town from the 1750s onwards in response to the increasingly popular pastime of 'taking the waters'. It was never as popular as places like Bath, but hotels developed round the springs in the town and fashionable gentry started visiting in increasing numbers. This was increasingly so after the coming of the railway to the town in 1865 and by 1880 20,000 visitors per year were descending on Llandrindod. Hotels, shops and other facilities developed to cater for this growing market.

Taking the waters became popular as it was thought that the extra minerals found in some spring waters were beneficial to health. Extravagant claims were made for spa waters that were said to cure rheumatism, gout, asthma and other diseases. The doctors and analysts making these claims were often paid a fee by hotels in order to promote their venue. The water at Llandrindod had a high sulphur content, which was supposed to have cleansing properties. It didn't taste very nice but nevertheless was promoted as being 'good for you'. The town authorities in Llandrindod used views of the hills and romantic descriptions as well as references to Celtic culture to promote the town and its attractions.

But towards the end of the nineteenth century ideas of what constituted pure water began to change. The industry that was developing as a result of the industrial revolution needed large quantities of clean water and there were political imperatives to provide clean drinking water to the rapidly growing populations of Birmingham and other Midlands towns. It was decided that water straight from the Welsh hillsides would solve the problem. The Elan Valley was identified as a suitable location to build a series of dams and reservoirs to deliver sufficient water.

The municipal power of Birmingham and the ideology of the Victorian engineers created the imposing dams which still exist. The water was quite peaty but was described as 'pale sherry' in colour in an attempt to reassure people about its quality.

Subsequent promotion of Welsh water has linked its properties to the wildness and purity of the landscape, to the Welsh language, and to Welsh culture and mythology.

The popularity of bottled water declined at the end of the nineteenth century as good quality drinking water became readily available, but has experienced a huge growth in demand from the 1980s to the present day. This is a triumph of marketing over reality!

This fascinating talk shed new light on the subject and showed how clever marketing and promotion can change perceptions of something we all take for granted.

**Catherine Wilson**

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## **The Welsh March: a land of shifting identities** **Nia Powell**

This paper considered the nature of national identities and loyalties in an area where topography – hills to the west, fertile rolling countryside to the east – had formed a changing social and political boundary. Offa's Dyke of 757-796 largely followed the physical diversity. The counties adopted by the invading Norman lords in England did not exist in Wales, the castle-based military lordships bridging the border were described as either Englishries or Welshries, acknowledging their separate cultures. Llewellyn the Great c.1200-1240 tried to introduce Welsh identities into the English lordships by way of dynastic intermarriage, but without success, communities on both sides of the border retained their cultural loyalties. There are only minimal Norman elements in the Welsh language.

From the medieval period English writers have used the ‘otherness’ of Wales and its people to their own ends, as in the works of Andrew Boorde, Shakespeare etc. This continued into Georgian times, Henry Holland concentrating on the goats, leeks and antediluvian pedigrees of the Welsh, while Gilbray’s cartoons even depicted great landowners such as Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, being drawn through barren rocks by farting goats! To the romantic tourist here was a source of uncivilised landscape, people and animals, just those elements they wished to see, rather than study and understand.

Today the political boundaries established by Offa’s Dyke and the Act of Union of 1536 are still the conceptual English-Welsh boundaries, but other factors make this precise division far from definitive. Some families see themselves primarily in occupational terms; ‘are you English or Welsh?’ – ‘We be farmers’. The general impression is that there are still two distinct cultures generally co-existing rather than seeking to integrate, even though both work in the same economic environment, use the same services etc.

Nia’s Powell’s paper was particularly appropriate to this conference and to its venue, it raised many topics relevant both here and to other parts, especially those where new communities from elsewhere co-exist with others which have been largely unchanged for centuries.

**Peter Brears.**

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### **Llandrindod: from common land to spa town Gavin Hooson**

Gavin Hooson’s paper provided an informative history of the town, from its development as a remote farming community to one of the most visited tourist attractions in Wales in the nineteenth century. The beginnings of its medicinal waters were found in Celtic Mythology, which were later used by the Romans. However, it was not until the mid-eight-

eenth century that the taking of waters developed on a more extensive scale.

It was considered that the waters had to be consumed directly at the site of the spring if they were to have any effect. However, the wells at Llandrindod were located on a bleak common, and there were few facilities to visitors to use, though there were farm-houses on the common and the Llanerch Inn. The first hotel to be built in the eighteenth century was Mrs Grosvenor’s, but it was later destroyed by fire.

It was not until the coming of the railways in 1865 that Llandrindod was able to expand on a large scale; its remoteness was no longer a hindrance to visitors. By the time the railway line was completed from Shrewsbury to Swansea in 1868, the town was within easy of the large urban centres of South Wales as well as north-west England and the Midlands. Further development was facilitated by an Act of Parliament in 1862 which allowed for the enclosure of the Llandrindod common and for land to be made available for building. The first land to be made available was the Rock House Estate. Shortly afterwards, further springs were discovered at Rock Park and the area developed rapidly, in essence becoming the centre of a new town. There were further developments in the early 1870s as marshy land near the pump house was drained, allowing for further land for building and town expansion.

Llandrindod changed out of all recognition between 1865 and 1914. The settlement and its facilities developed around the spas and for the influx of large numbers of visitors who came during the “season” between May to mid September. As well as taking the waters, during the early twentieth century they could also partake in electrical treatments and engage in the many past times such as tennis, croquet and bowls.

After the First World War, like many spa towns throughout Britain, Llandrindod declined. By the early 1990s the Pump House Hotel had been demolished, making way for the Powys County Council headquarters. However, there are still many reminders of the heyday of the spa town, including sports facilities and buildings where the waters were taken.

Gavin Hooson's stimulating and informative paper was accompanied by a large number of archival records and photographs which showed the town in its heyday as well as its decline. These really brought the development of the town to life, highlighting what a significant attraction the place must have been like. The paper provided an informative introduction to the town, allowing the conference participants to understand the importance and attraction of the town before we ventured to see it in the heavy rain.

**Heather Holmes**

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**Llan-gors Crannog –  
an early medieval time capsule  
Mark Redknap**

Mark Redknap brought all his enthusiasm as an archaeologist to dovetailing assistance from several disciplines in a better understanding of the unique site of Llan-gors crannog, the only crannog or lake dwelling found thus far in Wales and England, located on the lake of the same name (Llyn Syfaddan in Welsh) in South Wales. Waterlogged sites are often enough an archaeologist's dream, witness the recent discovery of the Faddan More psaltery (also called the 'lasagne book'), but Mark and his colleagues have combined history, folklore and archaeology in their analysis of the settlement, which folklore qualified as doomed to destruction, due to a transgression. This is but part of a rich trove of lore connected with the lake and etiological legends about where some of its features or artifacts came from, but there are also unusual references to a secular site in pre-Norman historical sources. Discovered in the 1860s, its waterlogged timbers are well preserved, although excavating in the 'yellow murk' Mark showed us could only be qualified as an interesting version of fun, and led to C14 dating of the palisade walls destruction, then to the excavators' hypotheses about possible explanations of such a dramatic event. The construction details – an intriguing systematic working plan, the revetting, wattling, the belts and braces procedure – seem to indicate the hand of

an Irish master craftsman overseeing the work, and the high-status artefacts indeed included Irish-influenced brooch pins, as well as glass rings and drinking horns implying a likely function as a feasting centre, seconded by the high percentage of red deer remains.

Mark tossed out a general request for information about a 'mystery' piece, a slotted, pointed tool, perhaps used to work rushes or netting, to which members are invited to respond. He brought up the subject of typologies undertaken in part by Cyril Fox, as regards the 1920s find of a log boat, as well as present-day modelisations to lend weight to their hypotheses on the dwellings. Among the most remarkable finds are the textiles, a folded piece of linen with silk (23 threads/cm!), again emphasising the high status of the site, perhaps comparable to Saint Cuthbert's stole, even to articles in the Chartres treasury. Designs are being fruitfully compared with those in metal and wood, perhaps indicating origins or influence from Alfred the Great's court and networks of diplomatic largesse. In any case, the area was well known to Giraldus Cambrensis, who mentions the legend that birds on the lake sing for the true ruler, an association of royalty and birds familiar in the field of Celtic studies. Some of these legends, such as the changing colours of the lake, might well be founded in sediment flows, and there was a lively 'flow' of legendary material right into the 16th century, witness to the impressiveness of the site over time. An important revelation of the excavations has been that the crannog buildings were not, as so often assumed, on stilts, which adds to progressively changing subtleties emerging from the investigations into lake dwellings.\*

\*Check out the Llangorse Crannog website : <http://www.llangorselake.co.uk/crannog.html>, where you will find links at [http://archaeology.about.com/od/lterms/qt/llangorse\\_crann.htm](http://archaeology.about.com/od/lterms/qt/llangorse_crann.htm) to further reading (keeping in mind that the team is now preparing their final report): Alan Lane and Mark Redknap. 2001. Llangors Crannóg. Pp. 205-207 in Pam Crabtree (ed.), *Medieval Archaeology: An Encyclopedia*. Garland Publishing, New York and Redknap, Mark and Alan Lane. 1994. [The Early Medieval crannóg at Llangors,](#)

Powys: an interim statement on the 1989-1993 seasons. *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 23(3):189-205.

**Cozette Griffin-Kremer**

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**Unitarianism and murder  
in 1870s Ulster  
Linda Ballard**

It's amazing how facts can become distorted over time; something straightforwardly horrible can become even more gruesome. Linda's paper illustrated this beautifully. Linda first came across the mention of a house with a mysterious bloodstain, (smeared by the bloody hand of a mistress murdering her maid) as a new museum worker whilst she was reading two pieces of writing by a local schoolgirl from the 1950s. (We were able to read photocopies of this.) So, many years later Linda decided to seek out the source.

It seems that several short legends from Holywood, Co. Down make reference to "an ineradicable bloodstain after a bloody tragedy" and one of these relates to Miss Isabella Ker who was murdered in her own home on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1872. This was widely reported in the press and mentioned in Hansard the following January. One newspaper seemed to have a somewhat unhealthy interest in the blood, mentioning it repeatedly in the reports of the murder.

The facts are straightforward enough. Miss Ker was alone with two friends of her servants on a post-Christmas visit. Possibly suffering from neuralgia, she asked them to leave whereupon they attacked her. The servant returned and threatened to call the police so she too, was also murdered by the two sisters, Charlotte and Mary Law. Both were later arrested, confessed and were tried and convicted.

Isabella Ker has a memorial in the porch of the non-subscribing Presbyterian church in Holywood. This mentions her "dedication to the cause of Unitarian Christianity" and is of an unusual design.

Other than this memorial, what remains is the legend of the bloodstain. It certainly seems ineradicable. I blame the press.

**Sheila Cass**

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**Scots writer Norman Douglas  
as an ethnologist  
John Burnett**

My interest in Norman Douglas came about obliquely when reading Elizabeth David in the 1950s. A writer who could encapsulate 'The Ideal Cuisine' in the few lines of beautiful prose she quoted seemed to me to be well worth reading. For me, John Burnett's paper was a reinforcement of the importance of an often neglected writer.

To folklorists, perhaps Douglas's best known work remains his book on London street games. Burnett's paper however drew attention to the ethnologically descriptive passages in the travel book *Old Calabria* and the novel *South Wind*. He concentrated on the writer's powers of observation and his ability to describe the activities of the communities in which he lived. John did not hide Douglas's faults but for me any writer who could fascinate Mrs David, who was herself as autocratic as Douglas, has a value. Burnett's paper made me want to go back to Norman Douglas's original work. It also encouraged me to search out Mark Holloway's biography. Thank you, John.

**Eddie Cass**

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**Sean Ó hEochaidh and the folklore of  
Donegal.  
Lillis Ó Laoire**

Lillis' paper on Seán Ó hEochaidh, illustrated with maps and images was lively and most informative. Ó hEochaidh's life spanned most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century



(from 1913 to 2002) and for much of it he was the most prolific collector of Donegal folklore for the Irish Folklore Commission (1935-1971).

He worked hard all his life and amassed a huge body of manuscript and other materials that are now kept at the National Folklore Collection (NFC), Dublin. In the presentation Lillis briefly outlined some of Ó hEochaidh's methods and his approaches to collecting, as well as discussing the ideologies underpinning his success as a collector.

The paper focussed on the year 1947, by which time he had become a seasoned field worker of some ten years' experience. This was the year in which he visited *Na Cruacha* (The Croaghs, at the north end of the Bluestack Mountains), the Reelin river valley in south central Donegal, ringed by the low mountains that gave the place its name. Here a small community eked out a niche existence as sheep herders, peat harvesters and subsistence farmers. Ó hEochaidh was gratified to find a considerable number of monoglot Irish speakers among the community, which was locally regarded as a repository of old ways and speech. Ó hEochaidh's subsequent publication in *Zeitschrift fuer Celtische Philologie* (1962/3) detailed his visit to the Croaghs and gave a comprehensive inventory of the inhabitants' Gaelic sayings and idioms.

Lillis then went on to contrast the published account with his unpublished field diary to highlight how his more forthright day-to-day accounts of life in the Croaghs emerged in print as an expression of his admiration of this small, dwindling community and its people, where the adversities they faced were presented in coded understatement. The reasons for these changes were discussed in the light of ideologies of social class and hierarchy current in mid-twentieth century Ireland.

We have fate to thank for this wonderful ethnographic collection as Ó hEochaidh, had not set out to be a folklore collector, he was actually studying to be a primary school teacher when fate stepped in. On the morning of his exam he was starting his father's car when the starter handle spun back and

broke his arm. At the time one imagines this must have been seen as a great setback, but in later years he considered it to have been a blessing as he believed he had lead a happier life than if he had been that primary school teacher.

Lillis too portrays a similar love of his subject, the 'ordinary folk' are fortunate indeed to have such 'biographers' to record and reflect their stories.

**Elaine Edwards**

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**'Good fences do good neighbours make'?  
Borderlands in the Balkans  
Sarah Blowen.**

In line with her long-standing interest in the way museums work in society, Sarah took us to the mountainous region of Epirus that was split up twice in the last century between northern Greece and Albania, in spite of deep social, cultural and historical unities. This shared past is visible in material culture, trade and occupational activity (including transhumance, subsistence farming and other agricultural practices, or tinkers' villages), language, religion, ritual year traditions, dress, dance and polyphonic singing designated as a UNESCO intangible heritage. However, over time, the region also bears witness to how differences have at times replaced similarities, since the WWI 'soft border' after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, it also being the last area liberated from the Turks, and underwent the 1913 international community's surgical incisions to create new borders. These finalised the separation between Greece and Albania with a not-too-straight line that left the village of Tsamada on the Greek side, as recounted in, yes, folklore. A German archaeologist, head of the cutting-up committee, was said to have been so enchanted by the beauty of a church lamp, attributed to Saint George, that the saint himself was moved to request the commission to leave the village in Greek hands. As Sarah remarked, this may be a charming way to enoble a lot of dodgy dealing.

The border-building became quite impermeable after WWII in the civil war, as Enver Hoxha brought the Iron Curtain down with a clang, even breaking with Moscow to lean towards China and clearing farms and houses away to create a no-man's-land scarred by watch towers. By 1981, when Greece entered the European Union, then came under the Schengen agreements, this gave rise to a mushrooming of barracks and helipods to support border patrolling, as Epirus slid into being the poorest region in the EU, devoid even of railroad lines. When the Hoxha regime collapsed in 1991, there was a flourish of Ponzi schemes, a rush by illegal Albanian emigrants (even including Epirotes exiled to Kazakhstan!) and the consequent reaction and rejection.

This is where the Tsamada village museum comes in. In 1983, a writer undertook emergency ethnology, inviting Sarah as part of a group to evaluate how the collections could underwrite reconciliation, in the style of the *écomusée*, using material culture as a mirror to see the community in. There was a first attempt to tell the place's story as part of a pan-Hellenistic Greater Greece, but the region's tinkers travelled all across the mountain ranges, most especially to fill their daughters' dowry chests, in spite of the practice being outlawed, to little avail, in the 1960s, and these artefacts speak of similarity, as do the local costumes, the work of real cowboys in saddles, as well as the proverbial shepherds, the typical home interiors to be found all across the Balkans, all leading to Sarah's particular interest in how artefacts and custom are 'packaged', so that some very telling truths are somewhat cast into the shadow. For example, Epirus has a long tradition of immigration – there are a surprising number of Epirotes in Worcester in well established communities, and famous sons such as Nicholas Gage in the United States. The 'new' Albanians are repopulating the region itself and local politicians see their constituencies as a real trump card to be played for EU funding. This is a hallmark for what Epirotes themselves often see as a welcome, if difficult, move – back into the 'heat' of Europe, no longer pushed off to the periphery, always at the heart of the Greek

diaspora ethic of 'We are the children of Odysseus', where even returnees from the former Soviet Union can endeavour to build new lives.

**Cozette Griffin-Kremer**

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## **The persistence of Anti-Welshness in the Marches**

**Nick Mansfield**

As was pointed out by the speaker in his summary, the national, ethnic and cultural tensions between Wales and England have a long history. What makes these tensions stand out in Shropshire is the way they have been used – perhaps "abused" would be a more appropriate term – by elites within the county in order to nurture paternalistic and anti Trade Union views.

Despite its identification with England from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Shropshire was for centuries thereafter still much influenced by Wales and the Welsh. Indeed, Wales was ruled from Ludlow Castle. But, after the Acts of Union (1536 and 1543) there were several logical reasons why those living within the county would prefer to see themselves as English, including protection offered by Marcher lords. That did not deter the Welsh, who were busy traders in Frankwell, on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, as late as the 1830s – but who were forbidden to trade in Shrewsbury itself. Early industrial Ironbridge assimilated, then Anglicised, significant numbers of Welsh speakers. The arrival of railways, which made Shrewsbury an important junction, saw the town develop as a meeting point for groups and committees from the north and south of the country. To the west and north, around Oswestry, development of the coal industry drew in hundreds of families from north-east Wales; and as late as the 1930s, land hunger in Wales saw many Welsh farmers moving across the border in their search for land.

Power in the county still in many ways rested with traditional landed gentry, who perceived Trades Unions as a Welsh phenomenon, and who hated Lloyd

George, believing him to be a Socialist. Welshness was conflated with Socialism and Trades Unionism. No opportunity was lost to point out how reluctant farmers' sons from neighbouring Montgomeryshire had been to enlist during the First World War. "Proud Shropshire" was still "a bulwark against the Welsh": this sentiment enabled the county's landed elites to continue to manipulate rural society during the inter-war years, with the Labour Party's campaigning in Oswestry being vilified. The rural poor of the county duly voted Conservative, and there was a barely-concealed impatience amongst the Shropshire Yeomanry to have "one more go" at their traditional Welsh foe.

Evidence of tensions along the border can still be found from time to time. Shrewsbury Football Club's supporters will, from time to time, entertain visiting teams from Wales with the delightful refrain of "Always shit on the Welsh side of the bridge" ! (sung to the tune of Always look on the bright side of life' – there, I'll bet you're trying out now! - Editor's addition)

**Dafydd Roberts**

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### **Presidential Address from Eddie Cass James Madison Carpenter and George Baker; an analytical description of an artistic relationship**

Briefly outlining the background circumstances that brought Carpenter, the American folklorist, into contact with George Baker, Dr Cass explained that Baker is a 'hitherto unknown amateur artist'. He described working to reveal the reputation of this artist as 'a collaborative effort' with Stella Daunter, Baker's daughter, and the Address was given in the presence of Mrs Daunter and other family members who were warmly welcomed to the meeting. The collaboration came about following a letter written by Dr Cass to the *Gloucestershire Echo* with a view to contacting anyone who might know about George Baker. As a result, an article was published in the newspaper on 20 January 2010, and two days later Mrs Daunter telephoned Dr Cass.

Contrasting the collaboration between Carpenter and Baker with that of Ben Nicholson (and others of the St Ives School) and the naïve artist Alfred Wallis, Dr Cass pointed out that Carpenter commissioned work from Baker, making this relationship itself collaborative. Forty of Baker's drawings are now preserved in the Library of Congress in Washington, although when microfilm copies of material collected by Carpenter were sent to the library at Cecil Sharp House, Baker's drawings were not included. It is not known if Carpenter remunerated Baker for either his work or his materials, but a letter sent from the artist to the folklorist in 1935 includes thanks for a postal order, so on at least this occasion there appears to have been financial acknowledgement for Baker.



Courtesy of the American Folklife Center,  
Library of Congress and the Baker family.

Drawing on information provided by Mrs Daunter, Dr Cass outlined the biography of Baker, who was born in Gloucestershire on 8 October 1899. During the First World War he served as a dispatch rider, and thereafter worked as a 'rural labourer'. He married Carrie Irene May Holmes on 4 February 1928. During 1936 or 7 he began working for the National Trust at Hailes Abbey as a 'handyman/groundsman' while Carrie acted as a guide for visitors and also

made them tea. The family lived in a tied cottage until Carrie's death in 1942. During the Second World War, Baker was caretaker at Toddington Manor, and later he returned to various types of rural work including drystone walling and gardening. He died on 8 April 1951 after a minor collision while cycling caused fatal head injuries.

During his lifetime, several of Baker's drawings are known to have been published, although as yet this published work has not been traced. His death was recorded in a short article in the *Cheltenham Chronicle*, which referred to him as a 'talented amateur cartoonist'. This talent was very evident in drawings illustrating Dr Cass' Address and in work including two paintings of rural scenes that were brought by Baker's daughters to the meeting. As far as is known, Baker never received any tuition as an artist. He skilfully recorded events on the local and wider political scene, and was often to be observed sketching a face that caught his eye. It seems that many of these drawings were given away freely by the artist.

It is not known how Carpenter and Baker met, but this probably happened shortly after the folklorist began collecting folk plays in 1933. Baker's father-in-law was a mummer and his direct involvement in the tradition may be the reason why Baker's drawings of the Cotswold plays are alive with vigour and character. One of these presents St George and an 'actual' (rather than a costumed) dragon which the saint has just despatched. Interestingly, Carpenter considered the appearance of dragons in these plays as a 'corruption'. Nonetheless, he commissioned Baker to draw illustrations for a projected book on folk plays, and for another on sea shanties. In a fascinating comment, Baker revealed something of the nature of the inspiration for his work, remarking 'I have built up hosts of characters for your shanties but must hear a good howling wind before I get them right.'

Closing his Address, Dr Cass expressed warm thanks to Mrs Daunter, and in turn must be thanked himself for bringing the talent of George Baker to public attention. It was a delight to discover his work, to learn about his background and to appreciate the collaboration between him and Carpenter.

**Linda-May Ballard**

## **Members' papers**

### **The rambler's guide to Scottish rag wells, past and present**

**Morgana McCabe-Allan**

Despite its title, Morgana's paper focused on the Minister's Tree, a Scots pine, near Aberfoyle, Stirling, rather than any well. This was because it is the focus of similar practices but is more accessible than any contemporary rag well sites, allowing regular study visits. At Aberfoyle it is said that fairies turned the Rev. Robert Kirk (1644-92) into a tree, as they were annoyed by his *Secret Commonwealth*, which reputedly described his visit to fairy realms. It is difficult to pinpoint when the practice began, but in recent times both the Tree and its surrounding area have been hung with an abundance of rags and 'bits and pieces of people's lives'. Some of these things appear to be casually left there, others seem to have been deliberately taken to, and left on, the site. Some have messages written on them - most often wishes - is it acceptable for a researcher to read these? Regular visits reveal that the site is managed in some way - it has been cleared quite recently. An attempt to find another rag tree was unsuccessful. Was this because the decorating of this tree is a seasonal activity and the area was visited at the wrong time of year? Had it too been cleared? Or was it simply hidden from view by the trees that surround it?

Early in her investigations Morgana became fascinated by the processes by which the trees and the offerings change with the seasons, weather and decay. It is apparent that the custom of attaching of rags and other objects to the Minister's Tree and similar trees at well sites has similarities with a wide range of activities, including roadside memorials, and we hope that Morgana will keep us updated on her studies at future conferences.

She would welcome information on other rag trees, rag wells and similar phenomena, please send it to [m.mccabe.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:m.mccabe.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

**Roy Vickery**

## Tracking change – lily of the valley custom and festival in France.

Cozette Griffin Kremer



One of the delights of the conference is hearing about the work that members have been undertaking. Lasting for 20 minutes, approximately half the time of the formal papers, these sessions act as a smörgåsbord, giving the audience a little taster to stimulate interest in new subjects and tempt us into finding out more post-conference. Cozette is a regular contributor of these members' papers and this year she enlightened us about the symbolism of that delicate and beautiful plant the lily of the valley or as it is known in France, muguet.

Each May, for many years, it has been customary in France to give lily of the valley as a gift on a reciprocal basis. The 'lily' symbolises good luck and happiness. These gifts can be in many forms, cut or potted flowers, illustrations of the plant such as in old postcards which are reproduced (lily of the valley often appear in the embroidered postcards of the World War 1 period, and understanding their meaning of good fortune and happiness make the cards even more poignant) and today of course in the form of e-cards. It doesn't stop there though. The plant appears on china teacups, linen, perfume and chocolate packaging. So there is an obvious economic benefit to the custom.

Cozette showed us illustrations of the festival at Rambouillet where the whole community appear to get involved. Shop windows are decorated (though over the past 8 years there has been something of a decline in participation by the retailers), the local magazine and promotional poster campaign use the lily image and a parade takes place through the town escorting the 'queen'. The parade involves many floats and much work goes into creating these 'mini-masterpieces'. The makers of the floats 'want the spirit of the festival to give pleasure to other people.' Such customs are important to give a sense of belonging.

The culmination of the festival is the 'Night of the lily of the valley' where firework displays, concerts and funfairs are on offer. A church service is also involved, the queen being escorted by the parade to the service on the Sunday morning. After mass all go into the garden for a cocktail party.

Cozette then posed a question; why does this tradition continue? She is continuing her research and will report back to us next year.

**Elaine Edwards**

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### **Broadening the Society's membership**

An organisation that does not constantly assess the satisfaction of its stakeholders and look and plan ahead accordingly is one that is very likely to ossify and ultimately wither away. Our Society for Folk Life Studies (SFLS) can pride itself on having been responsive to the needs of its members and attentive to changes in the wider world throughout its first half-century. Indeed, the very longevity of SFLS that has been celebrated in recent issues of *Folk Life* is testimony for its dynamism.

It was therefore very welcome to have an opportunity on the Saturday evening of this year's conference to have an open-ended, informal discussion to investigate the best ways to develop a new generation of members of SFLS. This was most ably and elegantly

facilitated by Sarah Blowen. Like all useful evening discussions it came to no resounding conclusion, but this session gave a good insight into what motivates our existing members as well as suggesting a few ways in which new people could be attracted to join us.

It was very heartening to learn from our Treasurer that the Society's finances are in a stable condition, although everyone agreed that the overall economic environment for organisations such as ours was far from secure. The costs of holding the annual conference (and hence the price of attending it) are very hard to contain, let alone reduce, and this is certainly a barrier for many potential members. More worrying was the view that SFLS is seen by some upcoming heritage professionals as 'un-cool' and something hard to engage with. However, this gloomy observation was countered by our outgoing Editor of *Folk Life* who explained how the on-line publication of the journal, together with the digitisation of the back issues, have increased the readership (and hence awareness of the Society) substantially. An indication of this increased readership is that *Folk Life* does not now rely on the SFLS conferences as the main source of its papers and the quantity of submissions from outside the UK is growing. These international articles are certainly enhancing the Society's reputation for the multi-disciplinary study of vernacular cultures and here may be one way of attracting new members; by proactively seeking them through the quality of the information on offer, rather than expecting them to join for more general reasons. Having established a global reach through digital media we should perhaps now expand the breadth of the subject matter beyond historical subjects to focus on topical issues in broader cultural and literary studies such as 'place' and 'identity'.

Towards the end of this useful session, someone asked what would success for SFLS look like in five or ten years' time. In terms of membership it was estimated that we needed a minimum of around ten new members every three years, which seemed a very attainable target that the membership should adopt. More generally, everyone wanted a Society that continued to have a vibrant membership and a

lively and diverse journal. The current success of *Folk Life* is therefore a key starting point for attracting a broader membership from Generations X and Y.

**Steph Mastoris**

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### **The River Maps in Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* Steph Mastoris**

Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* appeared in 15000 polysyllabic lines in two floods in 1612 and 1622. 'Of Albions glorious Ile the wonders whilst I write / The study varying soyles, the pleasures infinite ...' Swimming through this vast text, there are times when one longs to tread on stable land. Men may come and men may go, but Drayton goes on forever. 'One of the most turgid pieces of poetry I have ever read,' added our lecturer. The title means both 'multiple Albion' and 'many blessings.'

Michael Drayton was a denizen of various noble houses, rising not because he had noble blood, but because of his literary ability. However, when a new king appeared from Scotland in 1603, Drayton hoped for preferment, but he did not attract the interest of James, a rival poet. Drayton turned instead to the Prince of Wales, and enjoyed Henry's patronage until typhoid overcame the Prince in 1612.

*Poly-Olbion* aims to provide a history of Britain (actually Cornwall, England and Wales) from the earliest (mythical) times to the end of the sixteenth century. The narrative is arranged topographically, starting in the Southwest (Cornwall) and ending in the north of England, and 'explained' by the spirits of all the rivers and major watercourses of the country.

The interesting part of the *Poly-Olbion* is not the cataract of adjectives, but the thirty engraved maps, done by the admirable William Hole (d.1624), and based on the sound ground of the atlas which the

even more admirable Christopher Saxton had published in 1579. Hole is an intriguing figure who cut dies for coinage, engraved music for William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons, and elaborate title-pages for London publishers. On the one he did for *Poly-Olbion*, Britannia's gown doubles as a map of southern Britain. In his vision, rivers twist like snakes across a flat and boggy landscape. In each water-course stands its specific nymph, depicted in Steph's words as '1930s Flying-down-to-Rio girls.' Hills are marked by country yeomen with crooks, and forests by archers. It is not clear why some places have been named, but not others, why harvest should have been represented in the Vale of Evesham, Sherwood Forest, and the Derbyshire Peak, but nowhere else. The most charming miniature scene is the contest of two choirs, Welsh and English, for Lundy Island, accompanied by bagpipe and bass viol. It is tempting to think that Hole was acting independently of Drayton, projecting some unknowable vision of history and landscape, and perhaps also exercising his sense of humour.

Towns are represented mostly by women, each with a castle on her head, though the person representing Cambridge uniquely carries a blazing sun in one hand and a golden cup in the other, and has milk gushing from her breasts. The meaning is not clear.

If all of this seems bizarre and intriguing, and you have access on the web to EEBO (Early-English Books Online), which you probably do if you are a member of a public library, then you will be able to access Saxton's great atlas, Hole's maps, and if even cribbage and fretwork have been able to dispel your ennui, Drayton's *Polyolbion*.

**John Burnett**

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## **Llanelwedd Rocks – farming on the edge** **Bill Britnell**

Bill Britnell's talk fitted comfortably into the conference theme, not least with Eurwyn Wiliam's survey of the study of vernacular architecture in Wales

which followed. Bill's early demob mood from his post as Director of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust also seemed to fit well into the Sunday morning slot. He now enjoys the title of Research Associate.

In addition to a detailed field survey in 1996, the Trust, or CPAT for short, has several times undertaken investigations on archaeological sites on the Carneddau range overlooking the broad sweep of the Wye at Builth Wells, not least in response to quarrying activity which so dominates this craggy, southern edge to the hills. The products of the quarry, incidentally, had already come to notice during the Saturday afternoon tour, as much of the facing and other dressed stone used in the construction of the Elan Valley dams was obtained from here.

A summary of the hill-top investigations in 2007 and 2008 of two Bronze Age burial cairns – 'tombs with a view' certainly – is accessible on the CPAT website which also anticipated the excavations Bill presented to us. A farmstead site of much later date – initially thought to be perhaps fifteenth or sixteenth century – was located alongside the second cairn. Whilst the investigation of the farmstead itself had to wait for another year, a corn-drying kiln and distinctive bread oven which probably belonged to it were excavated, each structure a fascinating microcosm of subsistence farming in this exposed and isolated spot.

The kiln was a fairly large stone-built structure, set into the slope of the hill, with a stokehole on the downhill side, a drying chamber on the uphill side, with a stone-lined flue linking the two. The drying chamber would have had a timber floor where the damp grain was dried before threshing.

The remains of the circular bread oven were found on top of the flue. This would originally have had a domed top and an oven door opening from the stokehole of the corn-drying kiln. At one time many remote farms probably had outdoor bread ovens. Straw and sticks were burnt inside the oven to heat it up, and once the ashes had been raked out the dough was placed inside for baking.



*The Llanelwedd longhouse from the west in June 2010. At the far end of the house can be seen one of the two fireplaces and to the right the remains of the spiral stairs leading to an upper floor. In the foreground is a circular stone bread oven, later inserted into the cowhouse at the lower end of the building. © CPAT*

Further work described by Bill included the excavation of the longhouse itself, situated on the very edge of the upland commons. In a county where the study of the long house as a building form has been long and detailed, here was an opportunity to excavate one almost in its entirety. Albeit relatively short-lived, it nevertheless remained largely undisturbed by later alterations.

Some 25 metres long and 5 metres wide, the longhouse had living accommodation at the upper end with cowhouse at the lower end, the internal floor plan and building functions being clearly revealed by excavation.

Not surprisingly, given the spartan nature of the finds, dating proved difficult but it seems likely that

this upland farm was established on formerly unenclosed common land around the later 17th century. It had been abandoned at the latest by the early 19th century, early enough not to be included in the Llanelwedd tithe map of 1845. Say c.1650 to c.1800 in round terms.

No record of either the abandoned farmstead's name or of its occupants has been handed down, but as it lay at one corner of a large field called 'Pen-y-graig' this name has been adopted. Bill devoted time in his talk to assessing its significance and the social status of its inhabitants, given the location on the edge of common land and close to transhumance sites and indeed droving routes across the Carneddau hills.



The modest 5 hectares of poor quality upland which made up the holding offered little variation, but it did include so-called ‘pillow mounds’, several of which were excavated in the 1960s and identified as artificial rabbit warrens, and therefore a source of food production.

Post-excavation work continues on find identification and on the fascinating search for social context. Probate inventories throw light on the relationship between landowner and the farmstead’s tenants, not least in who drew most financial benefit from the rabbit-farming activities.

Abandoned upland sites such as this one offer a tremendous resource for archaeologists and social historians alike, and a most appropriate topic in the conference programme.

Various summary accounts can be found on the CPAT website including a useful report in the Autumn 2010 Newsletter, pages 8-10 at [www.cpat.org.uk/newslets/news10-2.pdf](http://www.cpat.org.uk/newslets/news10-2.pdf)

**David Viner**

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*The corn-drying kiln with the stokehole in the foreground. The opening leads to a stone-lined tunnel or flue which channelled hot air to a chamber at the back where the corn was dried. © CPAT*

*The remains of a circular bread oven set on top of the flue of the corn-drying kiln.*



## Study of Vernacular Architecture in Wales

### The Dr Eurwyn Wiliam

In his fascinating presentation of the main actors of the study of vernacular architecture in Wales, Dr Wiliam reminded us that no field of inquiry can be fully understood without understanding those who mediate it. His detailed description of different working methods, academic preoccupations and feuds made clear how the study of traditional buildings was driven by conflicting interpretations based on strong individual beliefs.

The field of vernacular architecture study in Wales began in earnest with the work of David Thomas who, in his 1908 publication, identified “local distinctiveness” in traditional building based on the use of local materials.

Then followed the main period of development of the field focussing on two men: Iorwerth Peate and Cyril Fox. Peate’s role as founding-Director of St Fagan’s and first president of SFLS, as well as his talent for self-promotion, meant that his boss, Fox, lies somewhat in the shadows. As Director of the National Museum in Cardiff, Fox had the vision – so often solely imputed to Peate – to create an open air museum of traditional buildings in Wales.

Both men published influential studies of the Welsh house in the ‘Thirties and ‘Forties. Fox’s 1937 study of medieval buildings destined for destruction in north Pembrokeshire is important *éthnologie d’urgence* and the first to include cottages. Peate’s 1940 *The Welsh House* coined the term *longhouse* as a direct translation from the Welsh, but is ultimately highly selective in what it includes and commits the sin of copying verbatim from others – Fox included. Not only was Peate’s work derivative, but his view of history as unchanging led to a blinkered approach: he mythologized a narrow view of the past in not recognising the Industrial Revolution and focusing on the “nobility” of rural architecture. Peate’s real success, concluded Dr Wiliam, was as a

museologist, rather than the furthering of his own discipline. This accolade goes to Fox, who was the first to identify distinctive highland and lowland architectural forms and, in his study of Monmouthshire houses, provided the world of vernacular architecture with a “landmark to rival Darwin’s *Origin of Species*”, according to Peter Smith.

Yorkshireman Smith is the third significant figure in Dr Wiliam’s survey. His 1975 *Houses of the Welsh Countryside* developed Fox’s work and took an evolutionary approach, pioneering historical geography. Smith’s exhaustive research showed how building innovation spread and his detailed cutaway drawings revealed the diversity of farmhouse types in Wales with a north-east south-west split. His systematic recording was influential in the listing and preservation of many buildings and, by including the social history of the parishes he studied, he produced influential ethnographic work.

Dr Wiliam concluded that today the study of vernacular architecture is clearly moving in this direction; looking at people, not just pegs and joins. Technological advances are now making data-collection and interpretation more accessible. So, even if the discipline has no clear academic home or champion, with the merging of the Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with Cadw, it is possible for local communities themselves to take the lead in writing the architectural – and human – history of Wales.

**Sarah Blown**

## Excursions

The Society was treated to an evening wine reception, kindly sponsored by The Folklore Society and much appreciated by our members. It was held at Radnorshire Museum which proved to be an ideal spot to learn about the local area and enjoy each others company.

### Conference ‘on tour’ – medieval rood screens, an abbey, some dams and lots of water

The afternoon ‘excursion’ is a regular feature of the Conference programme and usually much enjoyed. This year was no different, with visits to various locations all nicely tied into the conference lectures on water, borderlands and the region’s strong tradition in vernacular architecture. And the sun shone, too ...

Ably led by the enthusiastic Dai Jenkins, we were joined at our first two venues by Ray Smith, recently retired from St Fagans where he had been a guiding influence in the conservation and care of the museum’s stock of historic buildings and in the study of Welsh building practices.

A good team therefore to approach and enjoy two of the finest surviving examples of medieval rood screens in Welsh rural churches, both in the valley of the Ithon a few miles north of Llandrindod Wells.

First stop was *Llananno*, in an isolated spot alongside both the river and the A483 road. The full-width screen here is a real surprise in this tiny church. Its medieval pedigree shines out, even allowing for its taking-down and restoration at a cost of £300 (sic!) in 1880 following the complete rebuilding of the church in 1876-7.

Its date is taken to be late C15 or early C16, and very much a product of the Newtown school of wood craftsmen, whose output is such a feature of Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire churches.

Ray gave the screen a physical examination, highlighting its particularly Welsh design features and the wonderful detailing which is such a characteristic of its type. A mass of intricate carving includes seventeen panels of biblical figures, fruit and flowers, leaves and tendrils. The simpler reverse side of the screen was also closely examined, its conservation history equally fascinating.

Onward and a few miles back down the A483 was *Llanbister*, another favourite and standing in a circular churchyard on hilly ground overlooking the Ithon. Did you know that Radnorshire has some 27 circular churchyards, surely a UK record?

Llanbister’s screen hasn’t fared quite as well and is less ornate than Llananno; it lacks the rood loft, its richest component. But it is also full-width across a wide nave, and so creates a striking presence, with a strong horizontal middle rail, always a Welsh characteristic.

Again Ray provided a welcome visual analysis, and there was also just time to admire another rare survival, the west gallery or singing loft of 1716, complete with some surviving instruments from the days of live music and live musicians.

Next stop, a few miles down the lanes, was this part of Radnorshire’s other key religious site, the ruined abbey of *Abbey Cwmhir*, the ‘Abbey in the Long Valley.’ A Cistercian site re-founded in 1176, its great church of the early C13 possessed the longest nave in Wales at 242 ft. Scale and severe simplicity combined.

Accessed through Home Farm, itself of no small interest, the ruins remain delightfully that, a ruin, albeit improved by a Cadw-supported conservation programme in the 1990s and funds from a more recent Welsh Cultural Heritage Initiative programme, designed to improve access and understanding at such privately owned sites, which has created better parking and a small interpretive display.

How a site feels as much as how it looks is an important part of the visitor experience. In the sunshine, this one was delightful and Dai filled in the site's links with early Welsh political life. That intriguing figure, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd (Llewelyn the Last) was buried here after he was slain near Builth Wells in 1282, actual grave site still unknown.



The second half of the tour involved a trip westwards, following the route of the great road and turnpike to Aberystwyth (today's A44) through Rhayader and into the *Elan Valley*. The destination was the great sequence of dams and reservoirs constructed in the period 1893-1904 to provide water supply to the city of Birmingham.

A monumental exercise which is still difficult to grasp even today, the scale remains impressive to any visitor to the dams, via the interpretation centre housed in the purpose-built Elan Village buildings of 1906-09 below the bottom dam, and especially to those like us lucky enough to be driven around the project in good weather and sympathetic light from bottom to top and back again (even if we didn't manage the whole tour).

71 sq. miles of sparsely-populated landscape was acquired by Birmingham Corporation for the construction of four massive dams and infrastructure, in a jolly 'Birmingham Baroque' style including a 73-mile long aqueduct to the city. Frankley reservoir contains 900,000 cubic metres of water arriving by gravity alone, an impressive achievement.

The whole story is intriguing; alas the booked time-slot with a welcoming guide was just missed, swiftly compensated for with 'a welcome cup of tea'; and then what can only be described as a jolly charabanc drive alongside Caban Coch and Garreg Dhu reservoirs, crossing over to follow alongside Pen-y-garreg reservoir to reach and wander onto the Craig Goch dam at the top. The fourth reservoir lay beyond, a fine sight in the autumn light of early evening.

Interesting too that there seems to be no general-purpose, popular History & Guide available in print, giving a detailed account of the project (the interpretation centre shop was disappointing in that regard). But if you don't mind a bit of 'gricing', *The Elan Valley Railway: the Railway of the Birmingham Corporation Waterworks* by C.W. Judge (Oakwood Press Classics OL71, 1987 and esp. 1997) is a thorough and heavily illustrated study.

### **Perceptions in the Elan Valley: Reservoirs or Lakes?**

Enjoying the tour from the back seat of the 'chara' also made me think about how this monumental construction, with its distinctly social enterprise function, is perceived by today's visitors, virtually all in cars or coaches. There is a good walking route using the former railway and increasing cycling promotion but the major experience remains car-borne.

The Elan Valley Trust was established by Welsh Water in 1989 'to protect the flora and fauna of the Elan Estate and to encourage public access and environmental education', which at least allows an overview and a firm imprint. It shows; there is little intrusive development post-the major project itself, which only serves to enhance that particular achievement.

Radnorshire historian W.H. Howse called the Elan Valley 'a small Lake District of its own'. And herein lies the key. Much of the 'industry' so-called in Elan is hidden; even the aqueduct takes some seeking out on the road in from Rhayader.



*Always a favourite, this is the Wallace Jones's Studio view of Graig-Goch Dam and lake, at the top of the sequence of reservoirs.*

This leaves those who market the area to promote the cause of 'Lakes'; even the great bulk of the dams themselves seem to enhance not detract. Of course if you have an industrial archaeologist's perspective they remain monumental pieces of work and a mass of absorbing detail.

An interesting study is to be had into the output, especially postcards, from local photographers in the mid-Wales towns around the Elan Valley during and especially after the building of the dams, the icons of the overall project.

Much of the archive of one at least is preserved in the National Library of Wales. The grandly-named Percival Benzie Aberly (1877-1948) ran the West End Studios in Builth Wells and the dams and lakes were stock-in-trade for him. Take a look at John Welson (editor), *Photographs of Radnorshire: P.B. Aberly*, published by Logaston Press in 2008.

Others did the same. Wallace Jones's Studio ('Builth Wells and Rhayader') was one such, and of

course the national postcard companies such as Judges and Valentines were busily promoting the visitor souvenir potential of the Elan Valley.

So there is a long tradition of the promotion of the concept of lakes, as opposed to the more mundane reservoirs, which brings us smoothly to today's concept of a leisure focus in the heart of an environmentally-rich landscape, capitalising on our endless fascination with water.

**David Viner**

## A Walking Tour of Llandrindod Wells led by Brian Maund



The theme of the conference was water, and the walking tour of the town was led in steady rain by the genial Brian Maund, who has lived all his life there. The umbrella-carrying members of the Society paddled in puddles as they made their way round calm streets with gurgling gutters. It was soon clear what a surprising place this is, a tiny urban-like centre with four- and five-storey brick buildings, with fields at the end of the street (or in one case, Tesco). In front of the Museum is a house built by a doctor in 1876, and the Museum itself was constructed in 1911: the town appeared in the generation between these two dates. Like most holiday resorts its growth depended on the railway. Llandrindod is unusual in that its leap from scattered hamlet to town took place later than most others. Silloth, on the Solway coast, might be a parallel.

A local entrepreneur, Tom Norton, sold bicycles and cars, and when he had a white-tiled showroom built he proclaimed on its front that his wares included aircraft, a memory of the days when they were individual and insect-like. There was a landing strip on a meadow by the River Ifon.

The railway made Llandrindod, and James Watt was the grandfather of the steam locomotive. In age, he bought an estate west of the town, at Doldowlod, though he lived and died outside Birmingham. His descendants are still in the house, though his ar-

chive, for many years stored there, has migrated back to Birmingham. In the public park we saw a spouting tap with explanation that J. Gibson Watt, one of his descendants, gave this fountain for public use.

The late-Victorian church of the Holy Trinity gave respite from the downpour. It rewarded us with a plaque to the memory of Edith Cavell and a stained glass window commemorating the winning of the First World War: "Thanks be to GOD who gaveth us the victory." The glass included a kangaroo, behind an Australian soldier. In an artificial lake above the town, there was another exotic animal, a dragon, spouting not flame, nor Welsh eloquence, but water. We were all grateful to Brian Maund for his time, knowledge and enthusiasm.

Several websites provide words and images which give a fuller impression of this Cymric gem <http://www.highlandmoors.co.uk/llandrindod-wells-spa-history.html>

**John Burnett**

## Minutes of the Society's Annual General Meeting

### **Minutes of the Society's Annual General Meeting**

Held on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod.

**Present:** the President (Eddie Cass) and 25 members

**Commemorative Address:** The meeting was opened with a short address by Linda Ballard in memory of the late Alan Gailey, followed by a brief silence.

**Apologies:** Apologies were received from Brian and Susan Loughbrough, Gillian Bulmer, Claudia Kinmonth, Senator Paul Coghlan, Paddy McMonagle, Patty Anderson, Andreas Heiss, K. Kawashima, Matthew Richardson and Seb Littlewood.

**Minutes of the last AGM:** These had been printed in the newsletter. They were proposed by Michael Larkin and seconded by Chris Stevens.

**President's Report:** Eddie announced that he had little to report, having got most of his formal duties as President over with in the previous year. He had written to the family of Alan Gailey on behalf of the Society. His only other involvement had been with the Study Day at Rydale Folk Museum.

**Treasurer's Report:** Treasurer Duncan Dornan pointed out that there has been a slight dip over 2012 but stated that there is no clear explanation for this. He reported that membership is currently covering the cost of the newsletter and journal and that he does not see any reason to increase subscription, given the healthy bank balance that the Society is able to maintain.

Proposed by Chris Stevens. Seconded by Dafydd Roberts.

### **Editors' Reports:**

#### **Lillis O Laoire, Journal**

Lillis, taking over from Linda, reported that his main task now is identifying articles for the next issue. Linda handed over 33 pages, including an article on festivals in Greece.

Lillis requested that Eddie submit his paper in the coming weeks, to which Eddie agreed.

Lillis shared his gratitude to Linda for the shadowing process, expressing his need now for hands on experience. Eddie thanked both Linda and Lillis, stating that the growing number of readers is encouraging.

#### **Elaine Edwards, editor of the newsletter**

Elaine questioned whether the newsletter remains the primary way which we reach people, pointing out that the cost has risen significantly, from £900 last year to £1100 this year. The increased postage costs were flagged as a significant factor. She then thanked all of the reviewers and those who submitted requests and photos, before going on to remind everyone that we can also put in adverts, if anyone has any. Elaine closed her report by asking for any suggestions regarding places to advertise the student place be submitted to her by email.

In response to this, Cozette pointed out that people love to be shown the newsletter when they are being told about the society, and to have material that they can touch, rather than being given a URL. Eddie agreed, and Mark retold a story of a local transport group that collapsed shortly after going digital and doing away with their newsletter.

Following this support of the newsletter, Elaine invited anyone attending a conference to request extras to take with them for other delegates.

#### **Website Officer's Report:** Heather Holmes

Heather informed everyone that she is continually updating the website but that there have been ongoing technical problems outwith her control which have been interfering with this process. She ex-

pressed her thanks to Chris Stevens and Craig, who have been invaluable in resolving said issues. A tweet will go out when everything is working.

Following a push in autumn last year, the twitter account is now following 466 other groups/users and has gained a modest following of 261. The twitter account allows us to link to lots of other societies, a feature which Heather finds very useful. She requests that anyone who knows of a society or group that we should be linked to let her know, pointing out the value of UK wide connections. Currently, Heather is tweeting when there are actual announcements, in order to prevent it from becoming a significant burden on her time.

Heather also manages the Society's Flickr account, and requests pictures for it.

Heather closed her report by requesting that anyone who wants something on the website sends it to her.

#### **Secretary's Report:**

Matthew Richardson sent his apologies as he was not able to get away from the Isle of Man at the present time. Eddie expressed his gratitude to him for his help. No full report available.

#### **Membership Secretary's Report**

Seb Littlewood is currently fully occupied at Beamish and also could not attend or submit a report.

#### **Conference Secretary's Report**

Steph pronounced the excursion on Saturday magnificent, and that Friday was also good, before expressing overall satisfaction at the hotel. He requested feedback forms be handed in or submitted online or by post.

Steph thanked Dai for his help in sorting out excursions and finding speakers, Dafydd for finding speakers, and Duncan for keeping finances in check.

Eddie responded regarding the service at the hotel with an account of the owner's mother checking that her son had been interesting enough and that we liked the hotel, and how he had told her about the staff's helpfulness in putting Dafydd's daughter on the big TV so that everyone could watch.

Steph then thanked everyone for contributing to the team effort which made the conference a success, before going on to details for 2014 and beyond.

The conference is now scheduled for 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> September 2014, Muckcross, Ireland. Pat Dawson is now looking after Parks, and the conference will fall in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Trustees at Muckcross.

2015 it is intended to hold the conference in the Black Country, Dudley, West Midlands. David Eveleigh is assisting with making arrangements.

2016 will be Dublin, on the proposed topic of Heritage, Politics and Identity.

2017 a tentative plan for Dumfries and Galloway, but nothing is currently confirmed.

2018 onwards – we have enough lined up to keep everyone busy for now.

Eddie stressed the need to reassure the Muckcross people that the conference will happen, following which Michael Larkin reported that Senator Paul Coghlan is already taking care of this and that they will check out several hotels in the area to try and assure the best price.

#### **Election of Officers**

Eddie thanked the council and officers for making his job so much easier, specifically Sally Ackroyd, Sarah Blowen, Catherine Wilson and Mark Kennedy, who are standing down.

New officers elected were Morgana McCabe, Cozette Griffin-Kremer, David Eveleigh and Mared McAleavey

#### **AOB**

Christine Stevens thanked Linda for her time as editor and for seeing through the transition to Maney.

Elaine – formally thanked Caroline (Folklore Society) for her enthusiasm and thanked the whole Folklore Society.

Eddie was pleased to report that Caroline had expressed that she likes the Society.

Anne Dyer thanked Eddie.



## Recent Publications

### A Service Rendered

'A Service Rendered' is a collection of poems written by William Murray Kilburn during World War One. Unlike much WW1 poetry this collection was not written by a serving soldier but by a young man unable to respond to the call of duty due to an accident. As a teenager he'd taken a swim in water that had toxic poison in it. He was to lose his eye-sight as a result of that swim. As soldiers returned from the front young William would meet them at his local railway station in Lanarkshire, interview them then turn their stories into poetry. Some of the poems were published in the local newspaper. His niece Mae McClymont compiled this collection and published privately in Oct. 2013. The title is fitting on a number of levels as Mae rendered a service to William and William to his peers.

Copies are available by emailing [maemcclymont@gmail.com](mailto:maemcclymont@gmail.com)

### This Terrible Ordeal



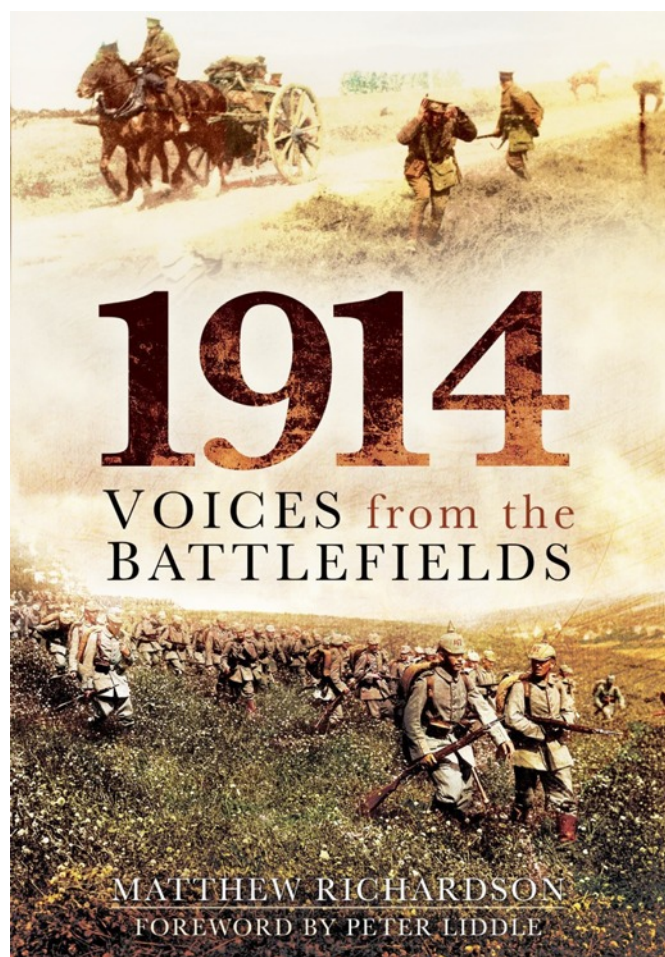
Written by Matthew Richardson, Manx National Heritage Curator for Social History, this fascinating new book charts how the Isle of Man endured the ordeal of the First World War. Previously untold personal stories from men, women and children are

revealed, alongside letters home from Manx soldiers and sailors, poetry and art produced in reaction to the conflict.

The book is the first of Manx National Heritage's commemorations of the role of the Manx people in this cataclysmic event in world history.

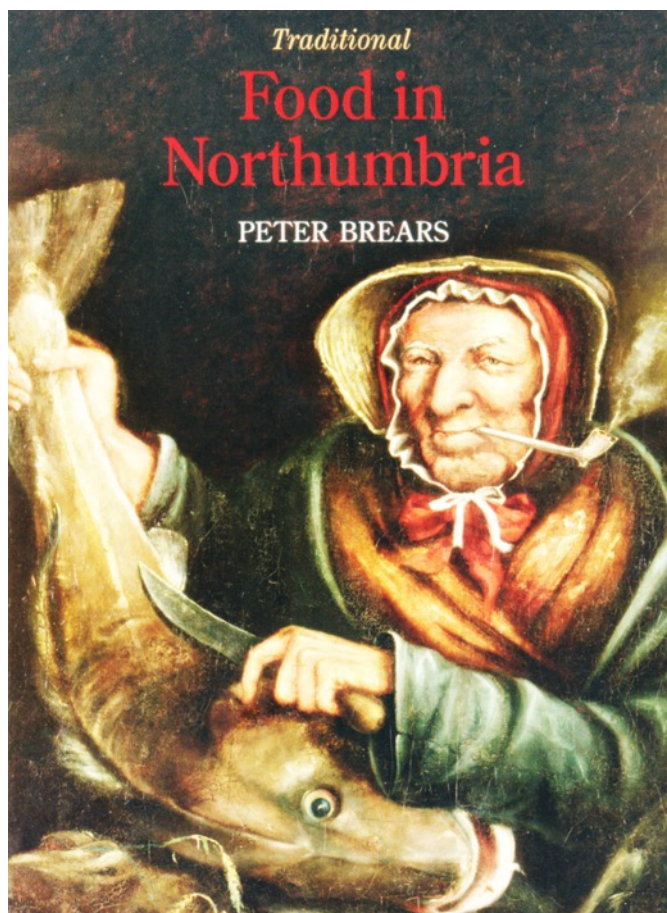
The 'Terrible Ordeal' is available from MNH shops and via website [www.manxheritageshop.com](http://www.manxheritageshop.com)

Also by Matthew Richardson, is



Published Oct. 2013.

Available from [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk) and 'all good bookshops'!



**Traditional food in Northumbria**, Peter BREARS, Excellent Press, Ludlow, 2013, 280pp, £19.95, ISBN 978 1900318 45

In this volume, the latest addition to a long shelf of his books on historic and regional food in England, Peter Brears tells the story of traditional home cooking in Northumberland and County Durham between around 1800 and 1920. As a museum curator as well as a food historian and cook, Peter provides a text that is an excellent balance between historical analysis, discussion of the material cultural evidence and practical recipes for a whole range of dishes.

The first six chapters briefly describe the living conditions and foods available to six of the most populous occupational communities in Northumbria. The remaining thirteen chapters provide short studies of various types of food, each set within its social context and with original recipes taken from historic sources. As with all of Peter's books, the text is beautifully illustrated with his own line drawings as well as historic photographs and prints.

## Scottish Life and Society AN INTRODUCTION TO SCOTTISH ETHNOLOGY

*Edited by*  
Alexander Fenton and Margaret A. Mackay

The recent publication of *An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology* sees the completion of the fourteen-volume Scottish Life and Society series, originally conceived by the eminent ethnologist Professor Alexander Fenton (1929- 2012). The series explores the many elements in Scottish history, language and culture which have shaped the identity of Scotland and Scots at local, regional and national level, placing these in an international context. Each volume focuses on a particular theme or institution within Scottish society. This introduction provides an overview of the discipline of ethnology as it has developed in Scotland and more widely, the sources and methods for its study, and practical guidance on the means by which it can be examined within its constituent genres, based on the experience of those currently working with ethnological materials. Theory and practice are presented in an accessible fashion, making it an ideal companion for the student, the scholar and the interested amateur alike

'Ethnology is a subject that relates to each and every one of us and there is no one who cannot be a practitioner. It is one in which personal roots, the home and environment . . . become part of the research apparatus of national identity' (Alexander Fenton).  
ISBN 978 1 906566 708

## **Forthcoming Conferences/Meetings etc.**

Applications are now being invited for the

**Gwyn E. Jones MERL Fellowship scheme for 2014-15**, tenable for up to twelve months, to support research in subject areas associated with the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) at the University of Reading. The closing date is 1 May 2014. Successful proposals attract a stipend of up to £10,000 for a maximum period of twelve months. Applications for shorter periods of research are welcome but would attract a commensurately smaller stipend. The funding can be used to offset teaching and administration costs, and other research-related expenses. Fellows are encouraged to participate in the academic programmes of the Museum. For further details of the scheme and information about how to apply please click on the following link: [www.reading.ac.uk/merl/research/merl\\_fellowships.aspx](http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/research/merl_fellowships.aspx).

Those interested in undertaking research at MERL may also be interested in other collections-based research opportunities within the University of Reading. For further details see: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/collectionsresearch/cbr-home.aspx>

Dr Oliver Douglas  
Assistant Curator, Museum of English Rural Life  
University of Reading, Redlands Road, Reading,  
RG1 5EX

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The National Museum of Agriculture in Szreniawa, Poznan, Poland will be holding the 3rd World Wicker Festival

**21 to 23 August 2015.**

The main organizer of the Festival is the Polish Association of Weavers and Wicker Craftspeople,

with the participation of the branch Museum in Nowy Tomyśl, which will be the venue of the event. Nowy Tomyśl is an interesting town with rich wicker traditions, and during the Festival it will become the world's capital city for wicker. More about the Festival at: [www.festiwal-wiklina.pl](http://www.festiwal-wiklina.pl)

Urszula Nowakowska, International Relations  
[u.nowakowska@muzeum-szreniawa.pl](mailto:u.nowakowska@muzeum-szreniawa.pl)

Andrzej Chwaliński, Manager of the branch Museum of Basketry and Hop-Growing  
[nowytomysl@muzeum-szreniawa.pl](mailto:nowytomysl@muzeum-szreniawa.pl)

## **Take a look at your Society's website**

**[www.folklifestudies.org.uk](http://www.folklifestudies.org.uk)**

The contents of all issues of *Folk Life* are listed as well as core information about the Society, including a membership form along with notices of Society meetings and conferences and the text of the *Newsletter*. The site is also available for members to post relevant information. Please send text as e-mail attachments to the website officer  
Heather.Holmes@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

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## **Change of contact details for the Treasurer**

Please note any correspondence for Duncan Dornan should now be sent to  
6/10 West Mill Road,  
Colinton.  
Edinburgh  
EH13 0NX

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## **Have you, or are you about to change *your* address?**

If so, please can you let our Membership Secretary know by emailing him at  
seblittlewood@beamish.org.uk  
or dropping him a line to the North of England Open Air Museum, Beamish, Stanley. Co. Durham DH9 0RG

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Contributions/comments should be forwarded to the newsletter editor Elaine Edwards at  
[e.edwards@nms.ac.uk](mailto:e.edwards@nms.ac.uk)

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