

Friends' Newsletter and Magazine



October 2010



A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

We hope you enjoy this, our first edition as co-editors. Once again we are indebted to Friends and to members of the Museum staff for much that appears between the covers but co-editing also seems to have inspired the two of us to produce significant contributions.

Our cover celebrates the work of Brenda Chamberlain. Inside is an article setting these two paintings and some of her other works in the context of her life. Unfortunately these works are not currently on display but hopefully this will change with the opening of the new galleries in the West Wing of the National Museum Cardiff. We are pleased, therefore, to have an article on the new galleries and what they might mean for the display of contemporary art.

One of the highlights, though, of this edition must be the reminiscences of Pat Kernick, President of the Friends. She has talked about her career at the Museum to Judy.

You may have heard about changes at the very top of Amgueddfa Cymru. Michael Houlihan has left for pastures new and his successor as Director General is David Anderson. More about this change can be found under Museum News. However, we are also pleased to publish an edited version of a speech that Michael Houlihan gave at a leaving ceremony in which he reflects on the tensions that will always arise in running Wales' largest cultural institution. The changeover brings to the fore the question as to what sort of role should Amgueddfa Cymru play in Welsh cultural life. Should it be a repository of Welsh culture, a showcase for Wales or should its main role be educational.

The final major article is about a little known piece of wartime history: the billeting of American troops in the Rhondda as they waited for D-Day. They were there for little more than a couple of months but their arrival had a huge impact on life in the area.

We are also pleased to offer some striking colour reproductions. There is the new Picasso acquisition and an artwork from the recent *Enchanted Heritage* exhibition at the Roman Legion Museum. We have articles on both items. Finally we are indebted to Hugh Jones for bringing to wider attention the Miners' Mural in Llandough Hospital. This mural occupies an entire exterior wall in the hospital and Hugh Jones raises concerns about its future.

As well as those photographs we are also able to illustrate a remarkable piece of silverware by Theresa Nguyen and you can also read more about this talented artist. We have included another piece by Dewi Bowen illustrated with one of his delightful pen and ink drawings. Finally, to bring the story full circle we have a short item on and a poem by Alun Lewis. During his tragically short life one of his major endeavours was a collaboration with Brenda Chamberlain on a series of poems and drawings.

We would very much like to hear your comments on the menu we have chosen for you. Remember though that the best way of influencing the content of the Newsletter is to write for it yourself.

On that topic we have been considering what should be our policy in regard to what should appear in the Newsletter. Editorial policy is perhaps too rigid a term but we do believe the following sums up what we are trying to achieve:

The aim of the Newsletter is to publicise the Friends as an organisation as well as give an insight into the work and acquisitions of Amgueddfa Cymru, including the development of its various sites. We also welcome more general articles, especially those that illuminate the cultural history of Wales. Finally, although we do not have the means to be a fully bilingual Newsletter, we welcome any opportunity to publish articles in Welsh.

So a final thank you to all our contributors, writers as well as photographers, and also one to those who have helped ensure the appearance of this edition.

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Happy reading

Judy Edwards & Diane Davies



CHRISTMAS DATES FOR DIARY

Tuesday 7th December: Friends Christmas Lunch at St Fagans.

Wednesday 8th December to Friday 10th December: Carols at St Fagans from 6:00pm to 9:00pm.

Thursday 9th December: Carol Concert at National Museum Cardiff at 3:00pm.

Saturday 11th December: Family Fun Day at National Museum Cardiff from 11:00am – 4:00pm.



FROM THE CHAIRMAN ...

Money, as the well-known song immortalised in *Cabaret* reminds us, makes the world go round. So for this edition of the Magazine I thought it fitting in these times of austerity to share with readers some insights on the subject, in particular as regards our own sphere of interest.

It would be easy to assume that all remains serene in the world of museums and galleries. Not so - the global economic ills reflect as keenly here as elsewhere and cut-backs are the order of the day across the UK. With arts funding diminishing, the museum service has to respond and at Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales the anticipated downturn has already prompted implementa-

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Front: Brenda Chamberlain, *Self-portrait on Carnedd Dafydd* (Oil on canvas, 30.5cm x 30.5cm, 1938)

Back: Brenda Chamberlain, *Man Rock* (Oil on canvas, 127cm x 96.5cm, 1962)

We would like to thank Nick Thornton for the opportunity to see the works of Brenda Chamberlain held by the Museum and Kay Kays for supplying the images.

Next Edition

Contributions for inclusion in the October 2010 edition should be submitted by the beginning of December 2010.

Please send items, either electronically or by post, to either one of the Co-editors:

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tion of the third voluntary redundancy programme in two years at the end of which the staffing complement will have been reduced by over thirty.

It is not only in terms of staffing that economies are being sought and initiatives are afoot across all sites which will lead to reduced energy consumption. For example, at National Museum Cardiff a highly efficient combined heat and power unit is being installed to replace the existing outmoded gas boiler. The unit will generate electricity with the by-product of producing heat required to maintain temperatures in the Cathays Park building, thereby reducing the amount purchased via the national grid. It is fair to say that Amgueddfa Cymru is probably better prepared than most other government sponsored public bodies for the difficult times that lie ahead.

It is increasingly recognised that the arts are not simply an

indulgence of the privileged few. Rather, they represent a vital element in the social fabric, contributing to the health and happiness of the community generally. The present economic stringency thus threatens to bring in its train unsought consequences if not managed sensitively. I recall a character in the Lord Snooty cartoon (I was an avid reader of the Beano as a small boy) saying that money was a terrible thing if you didn't have enough of it. This pretty well I suppose sums up the difficulty facing the arts today.

To close on a positive note, and as reported elsewhere in the Newsletter and Magazine, this autumn sees David Anderson taking over from Michael Houlihan as Director-General. While we are sorry to see Mike go, I'm sure all Friends will join me in wishing David a long and successful innings at Amgueddfa Cymru- National Museum Wales.

Roger Gagg

SEARCHING FOR AN IDIOM: BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN AS ARTIST

Diane Davies

“A work of art is a mystery ... following a private pattern, an individual idiom.” (Brenda Chamberlain quoted in Holman p.57)

Whenever I see Brenda Chamberlain’s self-portrait in the Museum, I am always transfixed. Her head and shoulders framed by her golden hair seem to fill the canvas; she looks straight ahead, inscrutable, and her eyes, black pools that reveal nothing. Just visible behind her is the great glaciated valley, Cwm Pen-llafar, which runs down to Bethesda. Yet she is as unmindful of the sublime landscape as she is to the viewer’s gaze, rather it is she who dominates the landscape and the viewer. It is a statement of her single-mindedness but also a very naturalistic painting, the flesh faithfully rendered with the cheeks tinged with red as if proclaiming the exertion of the climb and her long blonde hair is brought to life by impressionistic brushstrokes in a variety of colours.

It was painted in 1938 at the start of her artistic career. She had moved back to North Wales with her husband John Petts, (1914-1991), after graduating from the RA Schools, three years previously. During this period she was beginning to establish her reputation both as an artist and as a poet. For instance, the following year she was invited by Gwyn Jones to submit articles and illustrations to *The Welsh Review* which he was setting up. Then in 1941 Alun Lewis (1915-1944) wrote proposing that she and her husband should work together on inexpensive broadsheets comprising poems and engravings. Between November 1941 and June 1942 six *Caseg Broadsheets* were produced in editions of 500 each, to which she contributed poems and engravings. The departure of Aun Lewis to India in 1942 and her break with John Petts in 1943 signalled the end of the venture.

She was born in March 1912 in Bangor. Her father came from Lichfield and was distantly related to Neville Chamberlain, prime minister in the thirties. He was an Inspector of Bridges for London Midland and Scottish Railways. Her mother’s side of the family came from the Isle of Man and Ireland. Her mother was a socialist with a passionate belief in equal rights for women and was the first female mayor of Bangor. She knew that she wanted to be both an artist and writer even at the age of six, having been encouraged as a young child by her mother and schoolteachers to paint and to write essays and poems.

After leaving school, she stayed with a family friend in Copenhagen for six months working as an au pair. It was there, in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, that she first saw paintings of the Fauves, Cubists and German Expressionists and works by Paul Gauguin.

“[It] was the first modern museum I had been into. Here I loafed among the early paintings of Gauguin, painted on the roughest sacking. I knelt bemused at the feet of Gauguin.” (quoted in Piercy p.105).

This admiration resurfaced in her paintings that come from her stay on Bardsey Island. Her first visit was in 1946 and she realised almost immediately that the island had re-awakened her desire to paint; a desire lost through the outbreak of war and the deterioration in her relationship with John Pett which led to their divorce in 1946. So in 1947 she moved to Bardsey with a Breton friend Jean Paul van der Bijl.

Whilst living there she felt at ease both with writing and painting. She began by painting the life of the island with studies of the fishermen/farmers and their families. A work from early in this period is *The Fisherman’s Return*. (illustrated on page 11). Its use of broad shapes and flat blocks of colours separated by black outlining are strongly reminiscent of Gauguin as if she felt an affinity with him in exploring life outside the mainstream of accepted Western civilisation.

The three young men have dark faces accentuated by the use of thick black lines to create their eyebrows and outline their forms which gives them a Mediterranean feel. Their portrayal echoes her description of the island children given in *Tide-race*:

“These young children are of Iberian stock. ... the skin thick and weathered to a dusky brick-bronze; ... knitted black brows that meet over the bridge of the nose; the mouth full and sensuous. Arms and legs show an unusual muscular power.” (from *Tide-race* p.180)

Their enigmatic stillness and deep-set eyes though hark back to the 1938 self-portrait. Overall, the flat blocks of colour create a sculptural effect that emphasises decorative patterning over characterisation with the three figures creating a curve into the distance and the grey, dead fish (bottom right) balancing the formalised cliffs (top left).

In 1951, came critical recognition when she won the Gold Medal at the National Eisteddfod at Llanrwst for *Girl with a Siamese Cat* (illustrated overleaf). The young woman is a family friend and the cat is one of the two Siamese cats she had with her on the island. Again there is an Iberian feel to the girl and characteristic use of black outlining to emphasise her features. She sits in a room full of naturalistic detail such as the decorative fabric of the curtains and shaped back of a chair but through the open window behind her rises a strange landscape of threatening waves of green hills. There is a wonderful tension in the pose as she sits protectively hugging an exotic cat but who of the two is the protector?

Although she lived on Bardsey she also made frequent trips to London and had extended periods in France (staying with her dealer Charles Gimple’s family in Ménerbes in the south of France) and Germany (visiting a long-standing close friend, Karl von Laer and his family).



Brenda Chamberlain, *Girl with a Siamese Cat* (Oil on canvas, 78cm x 73.5cm, 1949)

Drawings made on travels were often developed into paintings on her return to Bardsey. One such is *Intérieur Provençal*, an oil on canvas from 1952. It is a portrait of the photographer and painter Dora Maar, best known for being Picasso's mistress and muse during the thirties and early forties. The picture can be seen at the Glyn Vivian Gallery in Swansea.

In the mid-fifties, her subject matter changed to atmospheric portrayals of the sea and coast. One subject became dominant: the transformative power of the sea, particularly the way a drowned body metamorphoses into rock as it is transformed by the pull of the tides. Such preoccupations are also found in her first volume of published poetry, *The Green Heart* (1958).

One of the finest of this genre is *Man Rock* (illustrated on page 10). It is one of her largest paintings and is a striking semi-abstract work. The central torso-like shape is brown dotted with black cave-like marks but running through the brown are lighter grey veins creating the sense of sculptured rock. The white background to the torso is shot through with tiny bright red veins mirroring the stony veins in the torso. The picture is full of incidental detail, the misty mountain-like forms in the top left hand corner and the dark-red wing-like object at the bottom. All in all it is a fascinating work that repays viewing.

A watershed came in 1962 with the publication of *Tide-race*, an account of her life on Bardsey. It was coupled with a solo exhibition of her work at the Zwemmer gallery in London. It was, with hindsight, the high point of her career as both artist and writer.

Publication of *Tide-race* caused offence with certain of the islanders due to her portrayal of life on the island and in 1964 she gives up her home there. She moved to Idhra, a Greek Island just off the Peloponnesian coast, where she stayed until 1967 when the Colonels' coup forced her to leave. She returned to Bangor but experienced bouts of loneliness and depression plus financial difficulties. In June 1971 she took an overdose of sleeping tablets and died two days later after being rushed to hospital. She is buried in Glandda cemetery, Bangor.

Brenda Chamberlain spent her life attempting to combine her desire to write with her desire to paint and draw. At first she used linocuts and etchings to illustrate her poetry. Then on Bardsey she experiment with written material on the canvas. *The Doves* (1953) held by Gwynedd Art Gallery and Museum, Bangor has letters and words forming part of the crayon and gouache composition. *Children on the Seashore*, which can be seen at Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery, combines a description of the island children at play which is written directly onto the canvas and which is over-painted with a visual rendition of the scene. In this painting she felt she had been able to combine her talents but it was not a technique she developed.

On Idhra she attempted to combine dance with drawings and, later, came attempts to combine music and drawings. Her final works attempted a fusion of poetry and drawing rather than using illustrations as an adjunct to her written work. Such attempts were not well received being described as both "*esoteric and inaccessible*". Today, with a greater understanding of multi-media creations, perhaps her work would have had a more generous response from critics.

I will end with what Kyffin Williams said in his tribute to her after her death: "... *she will always be admired as an artist of unusual talent who allowed us to glimpse into a world of aesthetic purity of which we would have been entirely unaware.*" (quoted in Holman p.90).

I hope this article has given you a glimpse into this talent. 2012 will see the centenary of her birth and as such represents a golden opportunity to ensure a wider appreciation of her artistic works.

Further reading

Kate Holman, *Brenda Chamberlain* (University of Wales Press, 1997) provides a biography although it is primarily concerned with her written works. Jill Piercy has written on her visual art in Christine Kinsey & Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, *Imaging the Imagination* (Gomer, 2005), p.102-121. Brenda Chamberlain's depiction of life on Bardsey, *Tide-race*, (Seren Books, 1987) is well worth reading as long as you are aware that it is a poetic response rather than a strictly factual account.

OUR PRESIDENT PAT KERNICK

Judy Edwards

Pat had her 90th birthday party last month so first of all congratulations Pat. She was kind enough to invite me to her home when I asked for a chat about her links with National Museum Wales - Amagueddfa Cymru. As her name suggests she is from sea-faring Cornish stock – Kernow is the Celtic or Cornish word for Cornwall and Kernick means Cornish-man. However, when ships became steam driven and increased in size, the local harbour of St Ives was no longer able to provide safe anchorage and the Sea Captains of the family moved to Cardiff while retaining a much loved holiday home there.

Pat was barely seven years old when her father took her for the first time to our Museum. It was then, on that first visit, that she announced she was going to work there when she grew up. The building was so beautiful and filled with interesting things. Of course no-one took much notice but the dream persisted and her ambition became more intense as she realised the museum was full of wonderful living things like plants and animals. In those days there were live fish in tanks, lizards and snakes and a botany department full of plant and flower specimens. In the main hall two vases of fresh flowers were daily placed on a table – one full of flowers picked from gardens and the other full of wild flowers to encourage people to look and observe them on local walks.

It was Pat's own collection of pressed flowers, gathered over a number of years, that eventually persuaded her Father she was serious about working at the Museum. Her teachers at school had told her not to be silly and that no-one worked at the Museum, predictably encouraging her to think about teaching, nursing or medicine. Pat's retort remained the same: *"someone's got to work there"*. Eventually Pat's father spoke to neighbours such as Walter Tattersall Professor of Zoology at the University and to Miss Vachel, a well known botanist. Both said, *"I'll see what can be done"*.

In the event something was done and Pat left Howell's School at 17, in the middle of term no less, and commenced a four year under-graduate programme based at the museum. She loved the going from department to department learning all the practicalities to do with the different techniques involved in protecting, enhancing and displaying the collections. *"Every day was different – never boring, although I was not so keen on the reading requirements which necessitated a daily couple of hours in the library. Sometimes I would go home for lunch, taking the train from Queen Street to Llandaff North but often it would be sandwiches at my desk"*. At that time all the Keepers and Assistant Keepers were male but the two Librarians were female and Pat remembered an amazing woman who was stone deaf and wrote down messages and questions in long hand. She made the most perfect

models of plants and flowers in wax and then painted them exquisitely. They are still on show at the Museum.

Pat began life at the Museum just after Mortimer Wheeler and his wife left and she remembered hearing about how much the men missed following Mavis up the stairs because of her marvellous legs! She also called to mind the time her boss Sir Cyril Fox came in during her lunch break to ask her if a visitor could wait a few minutes in her room. He appeared to Pat to be quite intoxicated. Earlier that same day she had been sent down to the general station to collect a parcel containing some small lizards and, on her return, to put them into assigned cages. The box had been lined with scraps of soft fabric to prevent any damage to the lizards in transit. On reaching her room in the museum Pat had carefully opened the box and placed each lizard into a cage dropping pieces of the fabric on to the floor as she did so. One lizard escaped but by that time Pat was hungry so had decided to do the searching and clearing up after eating her sandwiches. The swaying visitor attempted conversation and then out of the corner of an eye Pat saw that the escaped lizard had hidden under a scrap of fabric which now seemed to be moving fast round the room. She glanced at the visitor who was now making concentrated efforts to stare carefully at the floor. *"Did you see that?"* he said to Pat. *"See what?"* said Pat innocently. *"There's something strange moving across the floor – can't you see it?"* Denying all knowledge, the 'game' ended as the Keeper suddenly re-entered the room and the visitor left with a very puzzled expression on his face!

This story reminded Pat of another job she was given during the early part of her time at the museum. This was before the World War II broke out in 1939 and in those days there was a rat catcher responsible for collecting dead rats from around the docks in Cardiff. There were many mornings when Pat would arrive at her desk to be faced with a large bag. Her job was to check through it for any black rats, carriers of plague and different from the common Norwegian variety. It was also common for members of the public to bring in things for identification and when she had been at the museum for some time she would occasionally be asked to undertake the task of identification. Notwithstanding her casual approach to the rat inspections, she said the one thing that terrified her was being faced with a spider! Not so when faced with another bag – this time it was bones: *"Here's a nice puzzle for you"* said a Keeper, *"See if you can put together three skulls from this lot"*.

Pat did not stay in Cardiff all the time. She was sent for example to Liverpool to learn about taxidermy, to the Museum of Tropical Diseases for different techniques in preservation and display and to London for Egyptology. She also met other students once a year when she went for a month to 'Headquarters' - the centre where the examination questions were set. It was as she left the Museum on her way to one of these destinations, that she paused to watch some museum staff very carefully removing all the porcelain from one of the glass-fronted cabinets and she asked them why they were doing it. They told her that they were helping in the preparations for the visit of Queen

Mary to the Museum. When she expressed puzzlement, she was told that the Queen was said to have the habit of expecting to be given articles that she admired and it was known that she had a special interest in that particular source of porcelain so it was to be replaced with an alternative collection of china for the time being!

Once war broke out, all sorts of things changed at the Museum. It was in the early 1940s that Pat remembered a visit from the Tower of London Beefeaters, who arrived with armour and many other priceless objects. They were not long in Cardiff before departing to hide their treasure trove in the mountain caves of mid-Wales for the duration. However, during that short stay Pat was persuaded to try on the armour of Edward the Black Prince: *"How anyone managed to fight while riding on a horse wearing such a suit I will never know. It was dreadfully heavy and I couldn't move either an arm or a leg. And then they pretended that the key to get me out was lost!"*

It was during the war that Cardiff benefited from London stage performances being transferred to the Prince of Wales theatre. One day while walking through the museum with her then boss the Keeper of Zoology, he began to complain about his work being interrupted by total strangers whom he was expected to show around the Museum. Do you know their names Pat asked, innocently? *"I'm told they're a couple called Rex Harrison and Lily Palmer"*. Pat thought quickly and then said *"If you're busy, would you like me to do the showing round for you?"* The answer was a grateful *"Yes please"*, so Pat went excitedly off to meet the two film and stage stars who arrived in matching belted 'teddy bear' coats even though there was a substantial difference in their height. They were as charming as might be expected and Pat had a tale to tell at the dinner table that night.

Of course memories aren't always happy ones and Pat had two that were very sad indeed. The first happened around Christmas time one year. It was common practice for the Deputy of Geology to be the one on duty on Christmas Day because he was the unmarried one, the plain one who was not very popular. Pat suggested that they make up a Christmas stocking for him and to get one of the night staff to hang it on his door before they went home on Christmas morning. So a stocking was filled with the usual small gifts, fruit and nuts. The next time Pat came into the museum she was sent for by the recipient who had made enquiries as to who had been behind the gesture. Pat had expected him to be cross but instead he burst into tears, telling her that no-one had ever done such a thing for him before. Six months later she learned he had committed suicide.

The second sad event was of much greater significance and prevented Pat from graduating. Her father died very suddenly turning her life upside down. His business involved chemicals and important equipment for the war effort. So with little or no experience of managing a business she took over her father's role in an environment with a completely different philosophy from the one she had become used to: at the museum it didn't much matter how

long a job took to complete providing that the result was perfect. In her new business environment the desired result was much the same but the timescale was completely different - things had to be completed by yesterday and this was quite a culture shock. And, since the war effort was paramount, like many others Pat also worked three nights a week as a Red Cross assistant nurse providing basic care for the nightly 3am admissions of casualties from the front, brought by train to the station close to Whitchurch Hospital. *"They were in a dreadful state"*, she said. *"It looked as if they had been lifted straight from a battle field and put on the train but it must have been even worse than that because of the channel crossing"*.

It was not until well after the war that Pat's attention was drawn to the existence of 'Friends of the Museum' by Professor Tattersall, then on the Board of Governors. So she returned to her favourite place in Cardiff but with a very different kind of role, where the various activities of a volunteer involved guided tours, fund-raising, helping behind the scenes, committee work and greeting visitors at the main entrance desk.



MUSEUM NEWS

New Director General



David Anderson has been appointed Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales' new Director General. He was previously Director of Learning and Interpretation at the Victoria and Albert Museum. His 20 years experience at one of the world's leading museums makes him well placed to lead Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales and he will begin his new role in October 2010.

David Anderson is an established international authority on learning initiatives in museums and an adviser to Government on many projects, including national museum and gallery education strategy. In his first role at the V&A as Head of Education, he created the first team in a UK national museum dedicated to community education. As Director of Learning and Interpretation, he led the development of the Museum's new £4 million Sackler Centre for Arts Education, which opened in 2008 and formed the National Museums Online Learning Project – the only public project that national museums have undertaken together.

He was born in Belfast and specialised in Irish history at Edinburgh University. • He started his career as a secondary school teacher but was attracted to museums by the potential they offered for lifelong learning. • His museum career began at the Royal Pavilion Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton and he then worked at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, before moving to the V&A. • He has written two children's books: *The Spanish Armada* (1988) and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1989). • He was awarded an OBE in 1999 for services to museums and education.

Mr Anderson's appointment follows Michael Houlihan's departure from Amgueddfa Cymru having been appointed as Chief Executive of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. In announcing the appointment, Paul Loveluck, President, Amgueddfa Cymru commented on the contribution he believes Mr Anderson can make to the Museum:

"Amgueddfa Cymru plays a vitally important role in the life of the nation. People feel passionately about it and the national collections in its care. David Anderson shares that passion and will be a leader who will enthuse about the role the Museum can play in Welsh life. Given his particular expertise, David Anderson is well placed to take forward the vision on making Amgueddfa Cymru a World Class Museum of Learning and further enhancing its contribution to the cultural life of Wales."

Christmas Ideas

Do you have a favourite work in the national Collection or think that one might make an ideal present? The Museum is offering a new service called **Print on Demand**. It allows you have a colour reproduction made of a work. The reproduction can be a photographic print or a print on canvas and prices vary from £10 to £60 per item depending on size. Of course images can only be made of works for which there is copyright clearance. For more information contact the Imaging Licensing Officer, NMW Enterprises Ltd., Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NP (Tel 02920 573280) or go online to: www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/shop and look for "Print on Demand".

You might also be interested in the Museum's Calendar for 2011. This features twelve paintings by Gwen John which are held by the Museum. Again there is more information to be had at the website referred to above.

FRIENDS' NEWS

Those who have supported the events of the summer will know that we have had a regular and successful programme of activities throughout the months of July, August and September, so a big thank you to the organisers.

For those of you who enjoy IT access to news of events, we are improving the website all the time and hope by the

end of the year to have at least six months of future activity on line so that you can keep dates free for when forthcoming event details arrive together with the Newsletter. To visit our website go to: www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/support/friends.

This brings us to the next couple of months during which we have:

- (i) An 'Open Day' for new and old 'Friends' with refreshments and 'behind the scenes' tours of the Museum on Saturday 20th November;
- (ii) The AGM on ??? when you will be able to meet David Anderson the new Director General of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales;
- (iii) Special Christmas events held by both Friends and the Museum (see 'Dates for Diary' on page 2).

New members

May we take this opportunity to welcome the following new 'Friends' and hope that they will participate in and enjoy the activities of our yearly programme; that they make use of our web-site and let us know if and when we

Miss Sian & Miss Rhian Ashton	Miss Janet Kelly
Mrs Rachel Barnett	Mr & Mrs P. Kinsey-Griffiths
Mrs Madelein Bidder	Mr Richard Madley
Dr Teri Brewer & Mr Michael Wilcox	Mrs V.A. Maidment
Miss Ann Bryan	Mr William Manning
Mrs M.F. Chamberlain	Mr & Mrs A. Martin-Jones
Mrs Patricia Chantler	Mr M.H. Miles
Mrs Roberta A. Dacey	Mrs Valerie Palmer
Mrs Gwyn Davies	Dr & Mrs R. Peachey
Mrs Louisa Fagan	Mrs Sybil Phillips
Mrs Marie George	Mrs H.C. Prosser
Ms Fiona Gilligan	Mr & Mrs N. Robertson
Mrs Nia Hall-William	Miss A.B. Saunderson
Miss Iona Hannagan-Lewis	Mrs R.S. Silverman
Dr Valerie Hannagan-Lewis	Mr & Mrs E. Slatter
Mrs Margaret Hancock	Mrs Joan Smith
Mrs Lyn Hassan	Mr & Mrs C.T. Spillane
Mr G. Hopkin & Miss Gill Platt-Hopkin	Mrs Sarah Stone
Mrs D.E. Jones	Mr & Mrs Mary Thorne
Mrs Heather Jones	Mr & Mrs A. Wiley
	Mrs Alix Williams

NEWS OF OTHER 'FRIENDS' IN WALES

News of 'Friends' activities around Wales comes from the BAFM Journal.

The Friends of Tredegar House gave a Christmas party last year for the local primary school children. The house had been decorated in Victorian splendour and the party was held in the oldest part of the house: the servants' quarters. The good news from the Friends of Llancaiach Fawr is that 'The Colonel's Chair' which they had purchased has arrived safely. The chair had been authenticated by the

experts at The Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagans, as belonging to Richard Pritchard, the owner of the manor in the 1640s. It had been used when he sat in judgement of felons, as well as when he had entertained royalty.



SUSTAINABILITY AND BIODIVERSITY



This year has been designated International Year of Biodiversity and if you visited the Museum in the early part of the summer, you would have noticed that the main entrance hall was largely taken up by the Museum's participation in the BBCs *Breathing Spaces*. Invited to a meeting about sustainability at that time, I thought it best to get out the dictionary in case the meaning of the word had been modified over time. But there were no surprises – the meaning was placed in context in terms of protecting a person, a building, a programme of action or a food supply for long periods and making arrangements for necessary support mechanisms.

The same themes of protection and practical support can be used with reference to various geographical, social or economic environments and to environments that are significant for the survival of species and ecosystems. From the Museum's point of view the words of Albert Einstein are being used to make us think about 'sustainability' in the here and now: *"We cannot solve today's problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."* This got me thinking about a variety of different 'problems' such as where have all the sparrows and cuckoos gone? What would happen if we had a Mediterranean climate in Wales and where are we putting all that cast off plastic? It also reminded me about the expectations we have for the use of chemicals and an account of horrible mistakes we made with DDT.

In the never ending struggle to prevent and control diseases caused by insects, DDT was initially seen to be in the forefront of that battle. It was even described as *"the atomic bomb of the insect world"*. We now know that atomic bombs have a fall-out that can be as dangerous to those who use them as to those who suffer from them. The same proved to be true when the World Health Organisation (WHO) began a campaign to eradicate malaria in more than 70 different countries during the early 1960s. There were a number of unexpected consequences. In the first place the chemical was not successful in exterminating **whole** populations of mosquitoes and the ones that survived soon developed immunity to DDT. We now know for example

that there are at least 50 different types of mosquitoes that can actually swim in DDT!

Secondly, the random spraying of large quantities of DDT on to marshy areas of the Third World can seriously upset local eco-systems. In Sarawak for example the DDT not only killed mosquitoes but it also destroyed cockroaches. The local cats who ate the cockroaches were themselves poisoned and died in large numbers. With only few cats about, the rat population boomed in the villages and these rats could be carriers of diseases such as plague and typhus. Freed from the threat of malaria, people in parts of Borneo were then threatened with bubonic plague. To solve this problem and to restore the balance of the Sarawak ecosystem, the WHO called on the RAF to drop cats by parachute into isolated villages. Known as **Operation Cat-Drop** this remarkable solution was less ridiculous than it first appeared. It was in fact an immediate and successful response to a man-made catastrophe that could have made life in Sarawak unsustainable!

DATE	TIME	OPERATION OR EVENT	OPERATION GROUP	PL. COPT.	SQUADRON	REF TO AIRCRAFT
13/03/60	1200	Operations				
		Drop of 20 cats				
		A total of 20 cats were dropped over Bario in the Sabah Highlands in Sarawak. 2000 lbs of stores were dropped including 800 lbs. wheater miller				
		20 cats were seen to be eating and drinking. The cats were seen to be eating and drinking. The cats were seen to be eating and drinking.				

RAF Operations Record Book, 13th March 1960 referring to dropping 20 cats over the village of Bario.

Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales has been developing a series of practises contributing to protection and sustainability (**cynnalcymru**). You may remember when the Museum took part in **National Tree Week** the public were involved in planting native tree species such as hawthorn and rowan to enhance the environment at St Fagans. The RSPB Cymru was also present on that day providing threatened species tours and raising wildlife awareness. Other related actions at National Museum Wales include (i) supporting the 10:10 campaign which aims to promote a 10% cut in the UK's carbon emissions during 1010; (ii) moving over to the use of recycled paper as standard for photocopying, and (iii) reviewing systems that are used to control the environmental conditions of galleries in order to ensure more intelligent energy standards for controlling conditions to protect our collections.

Judy Edwards

Image not displayed because of copyright restrictions

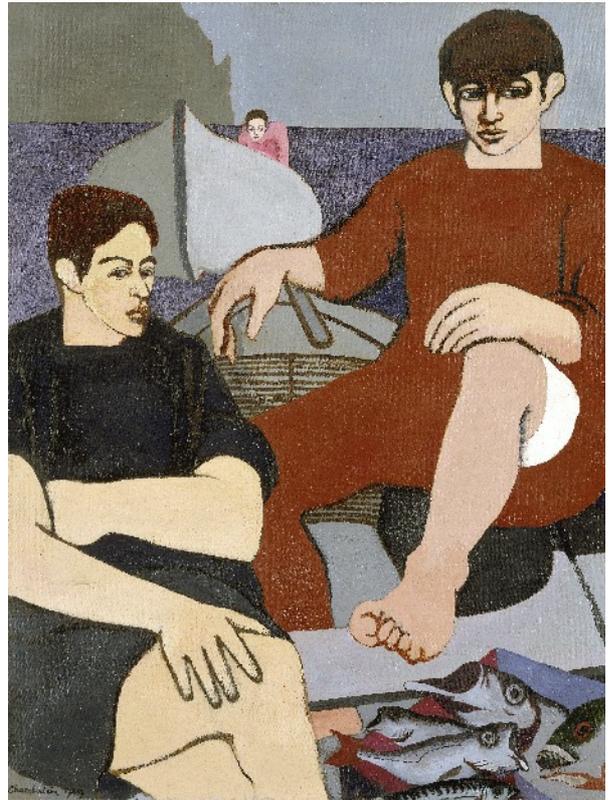
Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Still Life with Poron* (Oil on canvas, 50.3cm x 61 cm, 1948)
© Succession Picasso/DACS, London 2010

Michael Edmonds, *Miners' Mural* (see page 11 for continuation of the work and for full details)





Susan Smith, *Tragic Mask* (Silk tread on a linen ground, 50cm x 43cm)



Brenda Chamberlain, *The Fisherman's Return* (Oil on canvas, 102cm x 77cm, 1959)



Michael Edmonds, *Miners' Mural* (Ceramic tiles on wall in Llandough Hospital, 1959). Photograph © John Nelson.

The mural depicts the work of the Pneumoconiosis Unit and was donated by the National Union of Mineworkers (South Wales branch).

Editors' note: The black bar dividing the picture is actually a drainpipe running down the wall on which the mural is displayed.

NEW POST-1950 GALLERIES AT NATIONAL MUSEUM CARDIFF



Artist's impression of one of the new galleries

The scaffolding and temporary roof structure around the west wing of National Museum Cardiff signals that plans to develop new spaces for the display of visual art from the postwar period to the present day are underway. This will create five new spaces for the display of modern and contemporary art. When the new galleries open to the public in the summer of 2011, the entire first floor of the National Museum will be dedicated to the display of visual arts. This will be an exciting opportunity to see the great strength and depth of our unique collections, with spaces dedicated to art from the sixteenth century to the present day.

As the building work gathers pace, our attention turns to the challenge of redisplaying the national collection. In these new spaces there will be no fixed or definitive display. Broad themes will be selected to explore different aspects of the collection, encouraging visitors to make connections across a range of contemporary issues and debates. These themes will change each year, to ensure that as much of the collection is seen as possible through a regular cycle of new displays. This emphasis on flexibility will also give us the opportunity to use the new galleries for temporary exhibitions. In this way the museum can be open and responsive to the latest contemporary developments.

The new galleries will create vital new display space for our growing collection of modern and contemporary work. The museum's partnership with the Derek Williams Trust (DWT) has given us important opportunity to develop our post-1900 collection. The Trust's support has been of central importance in our ability to collect in an active and strategic way - in recent years much of this focus has been on contemporary work. In order to reflect the diversity of contemporary practice our collecting extends to work in all media including painting, photography, sculpture, installation and film and video.

Our collecting naturally focuses on artists from or based in Wales. Recent major acquisitions made between the museum and DWT have included work by Ivor Davies, Peter Finnemore, Barry Flanagan, Merlin James, Mali Morris, Shani Rhys-James and Bedwyr Williams. We also recognise the importance of placing Welsh-based practice in a wider international context. The DWT has provided invaluable

support in this area by supporting the Museum in making a number of acquisitions through the Artes Mundi exhibition including major works by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Berni Searle and Mauricio Dias & Walter Riedweg. The new galleries will transform the way this important and developing collection is seen and understood by our visitors.

The new galleries will also create spaces for visitors to learn more about the artists and work on display. We are currently planning areas which will feature reading and seating areas, comments boards and interactive computer terminals. This has all made possible with a generous grant for £36,000 from the Friends of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. We look forward to introducing you to the new galleries next year.

Nicholas Thornton



MINERS' MURAL, LLANDOUGH HOSPITAL

During a winter evening lecture to the Contemporary Arts Society, David Moore mentioned that a large mural by Ray Howard Jones was lost when the Western Mail buildings near the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff were demolished, and that there was a possible threat to a mural in Llandough Hospital.

In 1958, the artist and architect, Michael Edmonds won a competition to produce a courtyard mural in ceramic tiles to be sited near the entrance to the Pneumoconiosis Unit which was opened in 1959. Against a background of hills, collieries and mining communities, the mural depicts a sequence of scenes from the life of a coal miner. The artist, who now lives in Montgomery, was a Bevin Boy who worked in the mines of South Wales during the Second World War. He was one of three co-founders, with Eric Malthouse and David Tinker, of the 56 Group.

Some years ago, Dr. Peter Elmes, a former Director of the Unit, and Dr. Margaret Elmes expressed concern about the future of the mural in the event of development taking place at the Hospital, and suggested that the National Museum Wales might acquire and move it to the National Mining Museum, which it had recently taken over. A meeting was arranged by the Estate Manager of the hospital with Andrew Renton and a tile expert from the Art Department in Cathays Park and, after examination, it was decided that the mural could be safely taken off the wall and re-erected elsewhere. However, there were no plans for change at that time, and the Estate Manager promised to keep in touch if anything should happen.

In 2009, the Hospital Trust put in an application to change the old Pneumoconiosis Unit to a Breast Cancer Treatment Centre, and there was immediate concern about the fate of the mural. However, the construction of the new Centre would not affect the wall which supports the mural, and in fact access and the view afforded to the public

would be greatly improved as the area in front of it is at present forbidden to visitors. Whilst this is good news, it does not remove the threat to the work in the future, CADW says that no restrictions can be put on a work of art unless it is part of a listed building, and the current planning application was granted without the imposition of any conditions.

This emphasises the need for constant vigilance, so that action can be taken to protect a work that is well worth preserving, and I hope these few notes in the Friends' Newsletter will bring the situation to the attention of a wider public, and lead to a greater awareness of the vulnerability of this form of art.

Hugh Jones.



ENCHANTED HERITAGE: ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AMONGST THE ROMANS

Whilst the display of art is nothing new for the National Roman Legion Museum, a contemporary art exhibition in a Museum that is renowned for its archaeology collection is certainly something of a surprise to the casual visitor. *Enchanted Heritage* was a collection of original artworks using artefacts from the National Roman Legion Museum for inspiration. The group of artists responsible for producing this exhibition are known as *Makers and Practitioners*, or MaP for short. They are a collective of artists based in South East Wales who came together in 2001 out of a passion for contemporary arts and crafts. They have grown into a network of innovative craftspeople who work in a variety of fields, from weaving to metalwork and from sculpture to quilting. The artists pride themselves on their approachability and encouragement of others. In researching new techniques they attempt to provide the opportunity for others to join this creative world.

Following a number of meetings with Museum staff, each artist applied their own creative talent to crafting pieces of art that are as original as they are varied. Susan Smith created embroidery in the likeness of a tragic mask using silk and linen (illustrated on page 11): "*Much of my work makes reference to memorials or keepsakes so I was drawn to a beautiful carved ivory artefact, the original is only about 5 cm high but here it has been worked almost to life-size*". This is echoed by Elspeth Thomas who created quilted textile pots having been inspired by the classic Samian Pottery bowls from the Museum's display. "*On visiting the Museum I was immediately taken with the Samian Pottery which has a glossy red appearance. These were traded all over the Empire. Designs on the pottery included exotic animals in relief form and I have recreated a bowl featuring animals that have played an important part in my life*".

Originally the exhibition went on display in Llantarnam Grange in Cwmbran. Unfortunately the Museum could not accommodate the full range of artworks, due to the

number of pieces that were in the original exhibition. It was a difficult task for the Museum staff to select which items should go on display in the temporary exhibition space in the National Roman Legion Museum. However, the selected items represented a taste of the talents that MaP has to offer. Visitors who visited this display had the opportunity to read the artists' statements provided for each object which offer an insight into the creative process. As an accompaniment to the exhibition, and to fulfil MaP's mission to provide opportunities for others to join them in their quest to create, a series of workshops were offered as part of Adult Learners Week in May. Visitors were given the opportunity to make their own fleece or parchment works of art, or to cast their own pewter figurines. *Enchanted Heritage* went beyond simply displaying art, it inspired others to create their own art and to attempt to understand the collection in a way that relates to their own perspective. Sue Shields commented "*I was fascinated by the religion and superstition case. Each of the objects seemed to set up so many questions. I was given answers to my questions by the curators. The answers often seemed to set up lots more questions - and a feeling of wonder, which is perhaps, exactly what good museums are meant to do*".

Dai Price



NEW ACQUISITION

Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales has just added a significant new work to the permanent collection: *Still Life with Poron* 1948 by Pablo Picasso (illustrated on page 11). The acquisition was made possible by the Centenary Fund, established by the museum and the Derek Williams Trust in 2004, together with an additional grant from the Art Fund.

Still Life with Poron is one of a series of three still lifes painted by Picasso in Paris on 26 December 1948. The elements of the still life - a lemon, a lobster and a 'poron' (from porrón - a traditional Spanish wine pitcher) - have been placed on a table, tipped towards the picture plane in typical cubist device. The table sits on a floor made from distinctive hexagonal tiles which reveal the location to be Picasso's studio on the Rue des Grands Augustins, first used by the artist for the painting of *Guernica* in 1937.

Picasso painted relatively few oils in 1948. Much of his time during this year was spent in Vallauris in the south of France focusing on the production of ceramics at the Madoura pottery. In this way *Still Life with Poron* closely ties in with another major Centenary Fund purchase - the acquisition of four autograph ceramics by Picasso. It was also at Vallauris in 1947 that Graham Sutherland, looking for fresh inspiration in France, first met Picasso. The museum owns a photograph of the two artists standing outside the Madoura pottery.

The importance of *Still Life with Poron* is the way it

connects two great strengths of our modern collection; it creates a link between our late nineteenth and early twentieth century School of Paris paintings and our important holdings of postwar British painting. Major works by Sutherland and Ceri Richards will, for the first time, be seen in relation to the achievements of Picasso in the postwar period.

The painting was first seen by visitors to the museum in an in-focus display *Tradition Transformed: Picasso and Still Life* where it was shown in relation important still life paintings from the collection – notably Paul Cézanne’s *Still Life with Teapot* (1902-06). Between May and August this year *Still Life with Poron* will be on display in the National Library, Aberystwyth. From October this year visitors will be able to see the painting in the National Museum Cardiff’s redisplayed centre block galleries.

Nicholas Thornton



THERESA NGUYEN

Theresa Nguyen’s *Con Brio Centrepiece* is the latest addition to the display of contemporary silver at National Museum Cardiff.

Theresa Nguyen comes originally from Wales. She was born in Barmouth in 1985 but was brought up and educated in Birmingham and is now based in Birmingham’s Jewellery Quarter. She specialises in hand-raising sheet metal but, as this piece demonstrates, is highly skilled in a broad range of silversmithing techniques. She attributes her ‘inventiveness, curiosity and love of aesthetic precision’ to the influence of her grandfather – a professional gunsmith from Vietnam – and her father, a lecturer in

chemistry and mathematics.

While still in the first year of her BA in Jewellery and Silversmithing at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, Nguyen won the Goldsmiths’ Company’s Young Designer of the Year award. After graduating, she gained further experience in the workshop of leading silversmith Grant Macdonald, then in the Netherlands and Denmark, before spending a year refining her skills at the Bishopsland Trust in Oxfordshire, a prestigious post-graduate training workshop also run by Penelope and Oliver Makower.

In her work *Con Brio*, Nguyen has given hard metal a soft organic quality, making it appear to float weightlessly. This is how she has written about it:

•“*The design explores the concept of energy in a form. This object is conceived as a living force of nature. Full of vigour, she displays a release of energy captured in a single gesture. The effect is a graceful sense of movement but with lively animation. Techniques include fold forming, hand forging and soldering. The organic forms and subtly textured surface captures softness in silver, which is both sensuous and graceful.*”

The work is the second new addition to the P & O Makower Trust’s collection of contemporary silver since the collection was transferred to Cardiff from the Crafts Council in 2006 for display at the National Museum. Theresa Nguyen was chosen for this commission from an extremely competitive field, having impressed the selectors with the rich vein of inspiration she has recently drawn from studying leaves and the sensitivity with which her leaf-based pieces are finished. The result is a work of great originality and consummate skill.

Andrew Renton

Andrew Renton is Head of Applied Art at Amgeuddfa Cymru



Theresa Nguyen, *Con Brio Centrepiece*, (Britannia silver, 2010)

YANKS IN THE RHONDDA

Judy Edwards

Bryan Morse was eight years old and living in Tonypanyd when two American soldiers came to stay with his neighbours. He was fascinated by everything about them and when in 1994 he read about the celebrations to commemorate the successful D Day landings in Normandy, he expected to read something about the Americans who had been in the Rhondda preparing for D-Day but he was disappointed. He later discovered that tight wartime security had prevented anything being recorded about activities in the Rhondda so he set out to fill the gap using the minutes from Council meetings, newspaper reports, personal memories and letters. Needless to say Bryan found that the Rhondda, famous for its coal production and for its hospitality, lived up to its reputation in the welcome given to soldiers, most between 17 and 19 years of age and many away from home for the first time. Extracts from many of their letters show just how much this was appreciated.

America had entered the war in 1941 and by 1944 there were over a million and a half US servicemen in the UK alongside various other allied contingents - and it was getting very crowded! By June 1944 there were vehicles blocking roads and tented brigades all over the southern half of Britain. But of the three million Americans who passed through only 3% were billeted in private homes. In Wales their numbers climbed steadily from something over 34,000 at the end of 1943 to nearly 69,000 in April 1944.

Those that arrived in the Rhondda were amongst Eisenhower's Task Force for the invasion of France and for some the journey was not much fun. 3,300 of them boarded a converted passenger ship with a normal capacity for 1,500. There were two hour queues for meals, sleeping took place in shifts but sea-sickness or not, nothing stopped the card and dice games below decks! However, after a three day stopover in Newfoundland, one soldier wrote "... there were 5 days of storms, 7 of diarrhoea and 9 of submarine scares before we sighted the mountains of Ireland". The ship docked at Greenock, a 12 hour drive brought them to Newport and they arrived at their initial camp site after a 3 mile march to Malpas where they were faced with nothing more than a very muddy field.

The amazing news that American soldiers would be arriving in the Rhondda was announced at a Rhondda Fawr Council meeting in Pentre when the 5th Christmas of the war was only two weeks away and the news spread like

wild fire. Under wartime regulations the billeting of troops in private homes was compulsory and the practicalities became the responsibility of local police. Two and a half ton trucks would rumble into a street with a policeman sitting alongside the driver. After consulting his list, the GIs, arriving with their kit (and sometimes their weapons), would be introduced to a family. Mr. Spencer Jenkins of Salem Terrace Llwynypia for example remembers looking into the room of his two GIs "... and they had what looked like two bren guns on their beds".

Information about preparations appeared in newspapers – for example in *The Rhondda Leader*:

January 15th 1944 – Cwmparc and Treorchy 'Once again Ward 2 is the first in the field to form a reception committee for the Allied Forces shortly to be stationed locally and supplies proof of the endeavour to return the hospitality our lads in America are receiving. February 26th 1944 - Penygraig News in a nutshell: Penygraig social circles are making active preparations to welcome allied troops in the district'.



Soldiers from 94th Medical battalion outside the British Legion Hall in Pontypridd which was their Headquarters and Mess Hall

One committee was busy arranging dances, whist drives and light entertainment with choirs and singers put on standby. Another was arranging a programme of indoor and outdoor games. Later on the *Rhondda Leader* of July 8th 1944 reported that: *The baseball match postponed on Saturday will now take place on Thursday next at Ynysanghared Park at 6pm. The game will be*

played by two teams of U.S. Forces and a novel feature will be that one team will consist of coloured players.

The problem of feeding the expected 2,000 troops meant a lot was going on behind the scenes. Small groups of American officers arrived early in January; church halls were requisitioned and adapted for use as cook houses. Nissen Huts were also erected and the Tin Chapel in Llwynycelyn was to be used as a dining hall. The present day public library in Porth (then two empty shops) became a major food store supplied by the United States army who were not prepared for their troops to receive the amount and quality of food provided for British citizens. As one might imagine, this gave rise to the occasional 'overfed' jibe.

It was not until early May that the road north from Pontypridd was filled with a continuous convoy of huge olive green trucks bearing the five pointed star, most of them carrying troops. This seemingly never ending column comprised the 487 and 517 Port Battalions each made up of four companies of men who were basically dock workers, stevedores trained for the efficient loading and unloading of ships. They had been working at Cardiff, Barry and

Newport Docks but by the beginning of 1944 their role underwent a dangerous change and they had been sent to the Assault Training Centres of Slapton Sands in Devon and to Mumbles near Swansea in preparation for the amphibious operations necessary for the forthcoming invasion of France.

The news of American soldiers filling the streets meant that overnight the lives of Rhondda families changed radically as troops were billeted all over the area. Brian Morse remembers the enthusiastic interest of children for all things American including chewing gum and baseball. Children were forever seeking opportunities to talk to Americans – people they had only seen before ‘at the pictures’. The GIs carried weapons, rode about in jeeps and huge lorries making the experience a source of great excitement; and when the troops marched up the mountains in battle dress, a posse of children inevitably followed!

Barbara Davies, then seventeen and working in a Pontypridd shop, remembers the excitement of the weekend dances at the Park Ballroom. Teenagers flocked to local dance halls such as the Judges Hall in Trealaw trying out new dances such as jitterbugging or jiving to the tunes made popular by ‘the big band sound’ heard frequently on the wireless. After the days training exercises and an evening meal the GIs gathered in crowds in the main streets of towns before investigating the local pubs and clubs. Jill Walters recalls that “...there were American soldiers everywhere. When we got talking we would tease them about their girls’ names such as Marian, Ira and Gene but they took it in good part”

A Home Office Report in 1945 even expressed some concern about “the influx of Americans, speaking like the films, who actually lived in the magic country and who had plenty of money which at once went to the girls’ heads. The American attitude to women, their proneness to spoil a girl, to build up, exaggerate, talk-big and act with generosity and flamboyance helped to make them the most attractive boyfriends”. While most romances were transient, a number of Rhondda girls did marry Americans and joined the 70,000 GI brides who settled in the USA. Glenys, who lived in Ynyshir and worked in the canteen at Wattstown Colliery after leaving school, said that she and Chuck “...fell in love amongst the dodgems and the carousel”. After the war Chuck went back home to Modesta California but the romance blossomed with regular letter writing and in 1947 Glenys decided to join Chuck in the States. She said, “Mam was not pleased and would not give her permission to get wed but I was determined to go. But I have been back for 38 of the 52 years I have lived in California”.

During April 1944 there was a “Salute the Soldier Week”, the main purpose of which was to encourage everyone to buy National Savings Certificates and to contribute to other forms of fund-raising. The target for the Rhondda was £300,000 – enough to maintain a Welsh Battalion and Medical Unit for twelve months. It was meant to be serious but fun and there were dances and competitions with both Welsh and American soldiers marching in parades supported by Silver Bands. The final total for the Rhondda was £414,818.



Wartime card sent to Pvt. Lewis C Shaw billeted with William & Hilda Pearce, Cymmer.

By the end of May it was suddenly and dramatically all over. At around 9pm on 30th May at the end of the Whitsun Bank Holiday, the order came for the troops of the 487 and 517 Port Battalions to prepare for moving out of the Rhondda to join the Allied Expeditionary Force gathering at the ports of Southern England. Mrs Verdun Lucas remembered the night well: “I was sitting upstairs in the Empire Cinema in Tonypany. The film suddenly stopped and a message was flashed on to the screen – all American personnel were to report to their depots immediately. The lights went on. There were many American soldiers in the audience and they started to rush to the exits urged on by military police standing in the doorways. The cinema emptied and we found large army trucks with their engines running parked along the road. Girl friends were still clinging to soldiers and I heard the military police shout ‘Enough of that ordering the men into the trucks’”.

They were on their way to Omaha Beach. Whitchurch Hospital was on stand-by for casualties and in less than six days some of these same troops were brought back wounded and many never returned. However, in a letter in March 1945 to Mr and Mrs Colin Exell of Treorchy, Pfc. Arthur Bonner of the 487 Port Battalion wrote, “...They gave us the keys and let us do as they would have their own sons do. Most of the fellows in the Company have said that this was the best place they ever had except for home”.

Acknowledgements: We are very grateful to Bryan Morse for his permission to provide this outline of his search for memories of the ‘invasion’ of the Rhondda by American soldiers in 1944. It is worth the telling for those who grew up after 1945 in South Wales but never knew what had been happening in the lead up to D- Day.

Source: Bryan Morse *A Moment in History – the story of the American Army in the Rhondda in 1944* (2001, ISBN 1 902320263). Publisher: Prospero Books, 46, West Street, Chichester W. Sussex PO19 1RP from whom a copy may be obtained.

PROTECT OR PROJECT: WALES'S CULTURAL DILEMMA

Michael Houlihan



For thousands of years, the story of culture in Wales has been about preservation and protection in the face of many overt and insidious threats. The threats have been military, religious, political, linguistic, social and economic. But, over time, it's worked; a distinctive culture has survived thanks to geography, resistance, persistence and community. The dilemma now facing Wales is whether there is sufficient bravery and leadership to come out from behind the defences and to project this special and different culture of Wales to the World.

So this evening, I would like to present some specific and personal observations on culture in Wales, particularly around the leadership, governance, and administration of its institutional manifestations, and what we *apparatchiks* like to call the branding of Wales.

So what's so special about culture in Wales? In Wales culture is the connective fibre that gives community life. Culture interprets, explains and memorises, across generations, the kinships, common origins, collective myths and shared memories that are essential to a vigorous community. It commemorates the individuals and the moments that have shaped our past. It communicates the beliefs, values and habits which will define the future. It is all around us, the texture of our living, the place where past and present meet.

The crucial idea here is that culture, shifting and evolving as it does, is of the people, of the nation and of Wales. The establishment of the National Museum of Wales generated a new definition of a national museum, which ignored what one might describe as the English definition. According to this latter prescription, a national museum is funded by the nation and house(s) great collections of international quality. (The) remit is to show the world to Britain. Then, there is the Welsh definition; the museum of the nation firmly rooted in issues of national identity, national culture and national ownership. The foundation of a National Museum, a hundred years ago, was an unashamed, intellectual underpinning and articulation of a nation's cultural identity and aspirations reflected in what it collected and the stories it told. Similarly, the radical roots of St Fagans, set up in the years immediately follow-

ing the Second World War, reflected a compelling and urgent vision to preserve the distinctiveness of Welsh language, culture, folklore, stories and the memory of everyday life.

This leads me to argue that successful cultural institutions in Wales seek, principally, to reflect the culture of Wales. By and large, they have been successful in achieving this for Wales. Where they have been less successful is in making that culture available for the World.

So why is this? Let's take the case of history and its presentation in Wales where, despite the valuable curricula reforms of the last decade, the history of Wales is an option and frequently it continues to be an English perspective or context that is articulated in Welsh schools. Historically, this is in part due to Wales's porous borders which in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries drew it, almost seamlessly, into the industrial and economic story of the British Empire. You have to look elsewhere for the hidden and passionate history of Wales and the transmission of cultural memory. This is more likely to be found in the Welsh language with its shared stories of memories, events and people contributing to preserving a sharp sense of identity. As a result, those with some responsibility for telling the history of Wales, in the fields of education, heritage and tourism do so in ways that reflect the broad sweep of European and English history rather than the story of daily cultural and social interchange in Wales. It is made distinctive, in part, by the Welsh language and its expression in literature, poetry, folklore and music; but also by the conjunction of other non-linguistic cultural manifestations such as dissent, self-improvement and a relationship with the land. Sadly though, at times we only seem capable of generating a fiction, the Land of Myth and Legend. Even the originally radical St Fagans has become a cultural memory in its own right. Is St Fagans a microcosm of Wales itself, marketing a relatively easily understood, almost Hollywood image of a culture that never really existed, whilst the real grain and fibre of that culture is preserved and stored, museum-like, out of sight?

So how does Wales go about taking the precious culture that it has preserved and project it as part of its future survival strategy? In corporate terms, Wales needs a vision for culture and the leadership of this process can only come from government. The Assembly is now crucially placed to engage with culture to articulate a vision for culture and the part it is expecting culture to play in the bad times ahead. Otherwise, culture will be seen simply and simplistically as yet another expenditure barrier to closing the fiscal gap.

In respect of governance, I would argue that there needs to be a new compact between government and its cultural institutions. The future may inevitably be about smaller and less government and more institutional independence expressed through the Charity governance model. The close financial links between national cultural institutions

and government, as their principal funder, has led, to a relationship of control and, possibly, an expectation on the part of government that ongoing financial sustenance should reflect a more overt commitment on the part of institutions to the support of government agendas and policies that could best be described as peripheral to their core purpose.

Government involvement is often expressed through the triple mechanisms of accountability, compliance and performance measurement. To cope with these demands, public bodies have built up elaborate hierarchies, management structures and internal systems of scrutiny. Amgueddfa Cymru spent almost £600,000 last year on such control systems. In this environment, decision-making becomes slower financial procedures highly complex. In particular, risk-taking is not valued. Whilst this is understandable in the context of financial activity; it can also become a malaise that pervades and constrains governance in relation to intellectual and programming agendas. This can be to a point where timidity is more acceptable than the risk of upsetting the civil service.

The knock on effect of all this is that governance bodies, such as Boards of Trustees can find themselves obsessed with the scrutiny of managerial detail; sometimes displacing the roles of cultural leadership, strategic direction and advocacy. It is a development that can generate tensions between policy framing bodies and executives in organisations. I would also suggest that it can also skew recruitment to Boards, placing a higher premium on managerial proficiency and experience, rather than influencing and networking skills.

The key to successful reform of governance is about light touch. To maintain the overarching structure, but to do so in a way that liberates institutions to manage their own business, to generate more income and operate as efficiently as possible, yet ensuring adequate oversight by government for the expenditure of the public's money.

Clearly, over the next ten years, there will be a powerful driver to reduce operating costs. It is my view that, for Wales, this will be an opportunity to completely rethink and to streamline the way in which the government's cultural portfolio is run. The model currently used is in many ways a hybrid of the cultural infrastructure that operates in England, which has, undoubtedly, created silos of overlapping responsibilities and duplication of operational services. It is just not efficient; more importantly, isn't effective.

Might there be more effective ways to deliver culture in Wales without compromising on quality? For starters, we could look at who does what in terms of culture in Wales and identify areas where operational services and delivery could be shared. Does every organisation need to spend so much time – and money - on duplicating the same operational services, or is there a way to share financial, IT, marketing, education, commercial and HR services?

Let's also think what until now has been the unthinkable – do we need so many cultural organisations in Wales? Is there scope to amalgamate some bodies, even separating some away from government? Is it possible for the cultural players themselves to come together not only in partnership but also as consortia to provide leadership; to procure joint services; to project the culture of Wales to the World and, to show the World to Wales.

Finally, new technology will be critical. For example, early glimpses of the online People's Collection project, led by CyMAL, shows that it has powerfully re-engaged with local stories, local histories and local memories in a way that reflects the original ideals behind the creation of St Fagans. The difference is that St Fagans was of Wales for Wales; the People's Collection will certainly be of Wales, but also for Wales and the World.

In conclusion; I have not tried to answer all the questions that I have posed. But have attempted, in a very personal reflection, to accent areas of tremendous strength in Wales. At the core of this strength is the culture of Wales; I would urge those involved in its delivery to engage in a wider debate as to how we can project it better; and for us all to respect those past generations that did so much to protect the authentic culture of Wales and in doing so left a legacy that we can use to create a more fulfilled future.

Editors note: the above is an edited version of a speech the departing Director General gave at the National Museum Cardiff on Wednesday 14th July 2010



A WELSH DISCOVERY

A friend recently introduced me to the works of the Welsh poet Alun Lewis (1915 to 1944) who died on active service in Burma aged 28. Born and brought up near Aberdare, Lewis was educated at Manchester and Aberystwyth before returning to the Valleys and the Depression. In 1940, despite his pacifist inclinations, he enlisted in the Royal Engineers and then accepted a commission in the South Wales Borderers to fight in India.

Becoming a soldier had a stimulating effect on Lewis' writing. *Raider's Dawn*, an extensive collection of poems, appeared in 1942 and early in 1943, a collection of stories *The Last Inspection* was published. Both books were widely acclaimed. "The most assured poet of his generation", said *The Listener*.

Alun Lewis is recognised as an outstanding poet of the Second World War but he is strangely neglected. I hope you will enjoy this brief introduction to his work and perhaps reach out for more. The short poem I quote below is an example of Lewis' way in providing a picture in words.

The Rhondda

Hum of shaft-wheel, whirr and clamour
Of steel hammers overbeat, din down
Water-hag's slander. Greasy Rhondda
River throws about the boulders
Veils of scum to mark the ancients
Degraded union of stone and water.

Unwashed colliers by the river
Gamble for luck the pavements hide.
Kids float tins down dirty rapids.
Coal-dust rings the scruffy willows.
Circe is a drab.
She gives men what they know.
Daily to her pitch-black shaft
Her whirring wheels suck husbands out of sleep.
She for her profit takes their hands and eyes.

But the fat flabby-breasted wives
Have grown accustomed to her ways.
They scrub, make tea, peel the potatoes
Without counting the days.

With much appreciation I include the following acknowledgement for the poem above: "Taken from *Alun Lewis: Collected Poems* (Seren, 1990) and printed with the permission of the Estate of Alun Lewis".

Hefin Looker

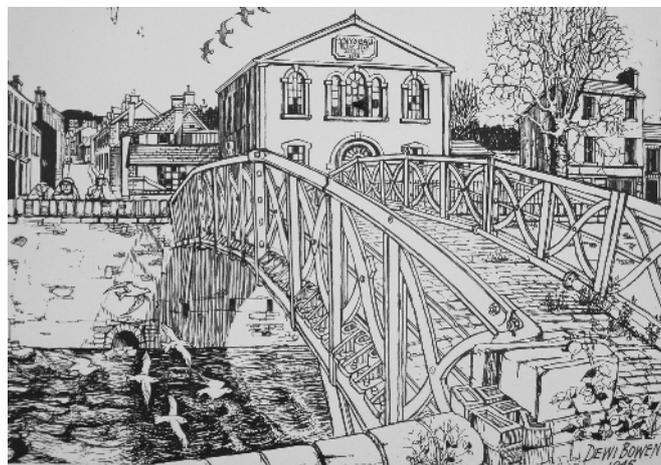


WATKIN GEORGE (1759-1822)

For some unexplainable reason, given what we know of his influence and prodigious engineering and other activities, Watkin George seems to have been overlooked in the history of Merthyr Tydfil, the largest and most dynamic town in Wales at the beginning of the nineteenth century with its radical class of Unitarians, republicans and patriots. He was born in the Ship Inn in Pontypool, then kept by his father and commenced his working life as a village carpenter.

Watkin George's career did not stand still for he became the first great engineer of his age in Wales. For thirteen years he was the mechanical genius and principal engineer of Cyfarthfa Iron Works in Merthyr Tydfil, the iron capital of the world at the time. He was charged with the active management of the works and made a partner in the company owned by the iron-master, Richard Crawshay. During a time of political turbulence, as Captain Watkin George, he even commanded three companies of volunteers who were 'drilled' in a field behind Coffins houses in Georgetown.

One of Watkin George's major engineering achievements was the Iron Bridge he designed and constructed in 1800



Dewi Bowen *The Iron Bridge, Merthyr Tydfil* (Pen and Ink drawing, 1945)

for Richard Crawshay to span the River Taff at Ynysgau in the centre of Merthyr Tydfil. It was to replace an earlier stone bridge destroyed by a heavily destructive flood. The cast iron bridge was a prototype in bridge construction and a most unusual piece of architectural iron work, robust and severe in character with ornamentation confined to emphasising joints, rivets, bolts and the use of granite cobble stones.

It was an early example of prefabrication built up of sectional units bolted together, three on either side spanning 70 feet of the river to stone buttresses. Watkin George took into account the very heavy traffic that would use the bridge with the continuous pounding of the iron-rimmed wheels of the wagons, coaches and carts. He was right to do so given the results below of a comprehensive census taken of the traffic and pedestrian movements over the bridge in 1860 over one week from Monday 25th June to Sunday 1st July between the hours of 8am to 8pm.

Totals	
Foot passengers	57476
Horses	773
Carriages, gigs etc	46
Carts, wagons	1835
Cattle	507

The bridge was an important communication link with the rapidly booming Cyfarthfa Iron Works and Merthyr Tydfil. George Borrow refers to it in *Wild Wales*, his account of travelling through Wales on foot in 1854. He walked the twenty-four miles from Neath to Merthyr reporting that as it grew dark he "went through a filthy slough, over a bridge, and up a street, from which dirty lanes branched off on either side, passed throngs of savage-looking people talking clamorously, shrank from addressing any of them, and finally undirected found myself before the Castle Inn at Merthyr Tydfil."

The bridge stood and withstood floods through one hundred and sixty years from 1800 to 1963. The bridge was a major part of the town's heritage but disappointingly it was dismantled in 1963 despite massive public protest.

Dewi Bowen.

Chamberlain 1962

