Friends' Newsletter and Magazine

February 2011

A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

If there is a theme running through this issue then perhaps it is that of family relationships. We have two major articles about family histories and what they reveal about the past. One is on the Knight family of Tythegston as reflected in a portrait by the 18th century painter Johann Zoffany. The picture itself appears on our back cover. The other article is by Corinne Renshaw and it explores the world of one of her ancestors, a farmer on the Gwent Levels in Monmouthshire, whose world collided with that of the Chartist uprising of 1835. On the theme of families we are also pleased to publish two poems by one of our readers, John Bailey from Prestatyn.

The third major article is on Hywel Dda, who ruled most of Wales in the first half of the 10th century. In 928 AD he promulgated a set of laws that also can be seen as being about human relationships but this time the complex links between a king, his court and the wider society that he ruled. The laws remained important until the Act of Union in 1535 and were copied into a thirteenth century Welsh manuscript which is now held by the National Library of Wales. The manuscript contains a portrait of Hywel Dda and we are delighted to display it in colour on page 11.

Our final major article is something completely different. It is on the Lidos and Baths in Wales. They were once a common sight throughout the country but now only one remains and, sad to say, a financial cloud hangs over its future.

The front cover is a striking image of iridescent green beetles. You can read more about why they are part of Amgueddfa Cymru's collections in the article on page 8. This article is one of four written by members of the Museum staff. In addition we have one on a Roman belt-buckle found at Caerleon with a picture of the buckle itself on page 11. The third article is on a recent find of a fossil at Penarth. The fourth is on the botanical illustrator G. D. Ehret with an illustration of his work on page 6. We are most grateful to Graham Davies for supplying these items.

We are also very pleased to have, as a colour illustration on page 10, a watercolour of St Fagan's Castle from around 1870 and you can read about Frances Stackhouse Acton, the artist who painted it, on page 17. Her family were the Knights of Downton Castle and it would be nice to claim a serendipitous link with the Knights of Tythegston but, as far as we are aware, they are unrelated.

In the last edition we reminded readers that we were eager to publish items in Welsh as well as English and so we were delighted to receive a short item from Havard Gregory. It is one that might be thought of as a postscript to Corinne Renshaw's exploration of an aspect of Monmouthshire history since it comments on how, up to very recently, English people still firmly believed that Monmouthshire was not a part of Wales.

In the last edition we also publicised the opening of new galleries at the National Museum Cardiff. One change we did not mention was the transformation of the old Glanely Gallery into the Clore Discovery Centre. Roger Gagg expounds on the enjoyment he had on visiting it with his grandson.

We welcome responses to items that appear in the Newsletter and take pleasure in publishing two letters which respond to the items on Biodiversity & Sustainability and on Brenda Chamberlain that were in the last edition. The one on Brenda Chamberlain is even illustrated in order to help put across its point. In addition, Hugh Jones has given us an update on the future of the Miners' Mural at Llandough.

Please continue to respond to what you read in the Newsletter and, just as importantly, submit articles for inclusion.

Diane Davies & Judy Edwards

FROM THE CHAIRMAN …

I do not often see the ***South Wales Echo*** but the headline "Charities' Cash Crisis" the other day caught my eye, so I purchased a paper. The story confirmed anecdotal evidence that many charities are feeling the effects of the recession. Thus far certainly the Friends are not 'fighting to stay afloat', to quote the ***Echo,*** and it remains the aim to maintain the level of support we give to the Museum. At the same time we have been holding down (or even, where possible, reducing) the cost to members of our various events while at the same time expanding our programme so as to enhance the benefits of membership and the resultant overall financial outcome. Subscription rates too - modest though they are - will remain at their present levels.

In anticipation of the Welsh Assembly Government's settlement, I commented in our last edition upon the Museum's response to the downturn. The terms of that settlement have now become known. Briefly, revenue support over the next three years will reduce by 4.28%. The reduction in capital grant aid for 2011/12 will amount to 35%, with a 50% drop in the separate specimen purchase grant. In hard cash terms this implies a drop of £1.36m for the coming year, rising to £1.8m in the two following years.

All this is pretty difficult, though it is heartening that the Welsh Assembly Government has reaffirmed its commitment to the policy of free museum entry and the continuation of the existing normal opening hours. Furthermore, major projects such as the creation of a National Gallery of Art remain on track, as is the 10-year proposed redevelopment of the National History Museum at St Fagans.

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Cover illustrations

Front cover: Cantharides or Blistering beetles (*Lytta vesicatoria*) (see article on page 8).

Back cover: Johann Zoffany (1733-1810), Henry Knight of Tythegston (1738-1772) with his three children (Oil on canvas, 241cm x 149cm, c1770) (see article on page 4).

Next Edition

Contributions for inclusion in the June 2011 edition should be submitted by the beginning of April 2011.

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

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November saw the first Friends' Day held at National Museum Cardiff, the purpose being to inform members about the Museum's activities while at the same time encouraging them to invite guests in the hope that they might be persuaded thereby to become Friends themselves - positive results are already apparent. Established with the active cooperation of the Museum, the event saw an attendance of nearly 150 (of whom one-third were invited guests of Friends) for a variety of talks and presentations on topics varying from modern art to radiocarbon dating. A buffet lunch was provided and Friends' Day concluded with a recital given by the eminent organist Robert Court, who had volunteered his services free of charge in recognition of the Friends' sponsorship of the Museum's Friday lunchtime Wynnstay Organ recitals. Without exception, the experiment has been well received and the concept will be well worth revisiting in the future.

Roger Gagg

CURATORS' CHOICE

Shanghai Bardic Chair

This Eisteddfod chair was presented as a prize for the best poet in the National Eisteddfod at Wrexham in 1933. What makes the chair unusual is that it was made at an orphanage in Shanghai, established by Catholic missionaries, where youngsters were taught crafts such as carving. The chair took four of them around 18 months to make. It is carved with both Chinese and Welsh inscriptions.

SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN THE 18th CENTURY

Ilse M. Fisher-Hayes

Whenever I walk through Gallery Four in the National Museum Cardiff, I seem to be drawn to the full length family portrait of Henry Knight of Tythegston painted by the German born artist Johann Zoffany in 1770. It might seem to be a surprisingly ambitious commission for a Welsh squire in the 18th century, but Henry Knight was interested in art and architecture, as is recorded in his diaries, and certainly he must have heard of Zoffany.

The accompanying text next to the painting clearly indicates that this is a family portrait; there is Henry Knight with his three children: Henry aged 8, his younger brother Robert aged 7 and their sister Ethelreda Catherine, aged 3. The painting is arranged in the fashionable pyramidal style or tree motif, frequently used in family groups, which gives the individual figures equal importance. Young Henry is perched on a huge bolder in the background, triumphantly holding up his father's helmet above his head; around his neck is a gorget. Robert is proudly carrying his father's sword. This clearly indicates that Henry Knight wishes his sons to take up a military career. But this also harkens back to favourite depictions of boys in Renaissance paintings. Their sister Ethelreda, in a white dress, is leaning against her father's knee playfully knotting a handkerchief around the halberd her father is holding.

But where is the wife and mother of the children? Did she die and has Henry, who is shown in civilian dress, holding a spontoon pointing downwards to the ground, abandoned his military career to look after his children? He had fought as a Captain in the 70th Regiment of Foot in the Seven Years' War in Germany, but he must have served also in the 15th Light Dragoons, because the helmet shows an emblem with the battle honour "Emsdorf", which refers to an action in 1760, when the regiment routed five battalions of French infantry. On his father's sudden death he returned to Wales and, after marrying in 1762, devoted himself to the running of the estate and making extensive alterations to his mansion in Tythegston near Porthcawl in Glamorgan.

Further research revealed that Henry's wife Catherine, the daughter of John Lynch, Dean of Canterbury and granddaughter of William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury, was very much alive when the painting was done. Henry had divorced her in 1771 and Catherine lived in London.

Letters kept in the National Archives revealed Henry Knight as a difficult man who had been involved in duelling and legal battles. I was immediately inclined to take Catherine's side. In the 18th century divorce was the prerogative of the wealthy and only the husband could bring about this procedure. It was only through an Act of Parliament that a divorce could be granted. This also meant an embarrassing search through family history, leading to the digging up and publication of scandalous events, so that scandal and gossip about the Knights must have circulated everywhere in London, because it was the only divorce registered in 1771.

But the plot thickens even more: the divorce had nothing to do with Henry. It was Catherine, who was at fault. In 1769 she gave birth to a bastard daughter, whose father was John Norris, the grandson of a famous admiral, Captain of Deal Castle and MP for Rye. Catherine married John Norris in 1771 and had a second family by him. She was the third wife of John Norris; his second wife had been the courtesan and society beauty Kitty Fisher, who was the subject of the well known rhyme: "*Lucy Locket lost her pocket, Kitty Fisher found it*". Several portraits of her are in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

The 18th century was an age of promiscuity, the French court of the time was often described as a hothouse of lust, yet everything French was greatly admired in Europe. Even the daughter and granddaughter of two eminent clergymen in prudent Britain succumbed to this *modus vivendi*.

Zoffany depicts the three children turned sideways to the left towards their father in an arrow-like arrangement that gives the composition a certain dynamic, which the father's body intercepts. The focus is meant to be in the bottom left corner. The halberd is no longer a weapon, but a digging tool encircled by Henry's legs. Zoffany points out that Henry Knight has given up warring and fighting for the fruit of his loins, his children.

These facts made me see the picture in a new light. When Henry Knight commissioned Johann Zoffany to paint this picture, Catherine had left Glamorgan and her three young children. Zoffany depicted Henry as the caring father, who gave up his military career to look after his children. Seashells on the ground indicate that the painting is set at the sea probably near Tythegston. Zoffany alluded to the great family drama by incorporating in the background a tree blown over by a storm. Yet all four family members are turning their backs onto the drama and confidently face the onlooker. Henry looks determined that his three children should be brought up away from London (where the Knights had a house in Warbeck Street) and their mother, whom they probably never saw again.

Yet this newly found stability for the three children was soon to be shattered again: in March 1772 their father died. A plaque in the church at Newton Nottage refers to his burial there. In his last will dated 22nd June 1771 Henry Knight decreed that Mrs. Anne Basset, whom he called "*my dear Aunt*", should be the guardian of the children and many contracts and documents show that she did this very responsibly.

For some years Henry had been re-designing the Tudor manor house in Tythegston. Most of the plans had been drawn by Henry himself; he was very much interested in

architecture and drawing and references in his diaries mention drawing lessons and the purchase of architectural books and drawing materials. It was left to his eldest son to finish the rebuilding about 13 years later when he came of age.

The portrait was painted by Johann Zoffany in 1770, a year after Catherine had given birth to a bastard daughter and a year before the divorce was finalised. It must, therefore, be seen as a defiant act by Henry to commission Zoffany to portray the new family unit. Henry Knight chose this well-known and fashionable painter, who exhibited that year for the first time at the Royal Academy, who had become the court painter of King George III and who had established himself as the undisputed master of the theatrical conversation piece. Henry Knight knew Lord Bute, who thought very highly of Zoffany and had introduced the painter to the King. Zoffany had already painted numerous portraits of the royal children and a family painting of the King and Queen with their six children was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1770. So this commission must have been quite a costly one.

Zoffany's ability to achieve a certain lightness and spontaneity showing family groups, was likened to Hogarth and was greatly admired by Sir Oliver Millar, the eminent art historian and curator of the royal art collection. He commented "*that 18th century English artists remain to a disgraceful extent terra incognita (except Reynolds and Gainsborough) and have only started to be appreciated recently*". Yet the depiction of the military helmet has often been criticised as a distortion. It appears too large in comparison to the figures. However, Zoffany might have done this deliberately to draw attention to Henry Knight's military career.

The purchase price was raised with funds bequeathed to the NMGW by Miss June Tiley, the National Heritage Fund and the National Art Collection Fund. The painting was sold to the National Museum of Wales in an auction at Sotheby's in June 1999 for £1,101,500 (hammer price with buyer's premium) and has been exhibited ever since in Gallery Four.

Ilse Fisher-Hayes is a volunteer museum guide as well as being a member of The Friends.

A ROMAN BELT-BUCKLE THAT THE EDWARDIANS MISSED

Archaeologists first excavated the forum-basilica at Caerwent in Monmouthshire early in the twentieth-century. When Museum staff returned to excavate the site again they found items that had previously been overlooked, including this late fourth-century copper alloy buckle and plate (shown on page 11).

The buckle loop has a pair of dolphins' heads facing inward and a pair of horses' heads facing out. The sheet metal plate was originally fastened to a leather belt with two rivets at the end. It is decorated with a cable pattern border and three circular motifs with marigold-rosettes on a dotted background. The curving projections rising from these look like the heads and necks of birds, suggesting that the motifs could be peacocks.

Peacocks can be seen on the buckle plate from Pen y Corddyn hillfort, Conwy, the only other example of this type of buckle-plate known from Wales That example is decorated with fish and a pair of peacocks facing a stylised tree. Peacocks are a symbol of immortality (their flesh was said to be incorruptible) and like the fish and tree-of-life can be interpreted as a Christian symbol. This has led some to connect both buckle-plates with Christianity, but they could simply be conventional decorative motifs.

Roman Military Belt

Buckle-plates like this have been seen as official issue military equipment. The 'military belt' was an important symbol of rank, although the style of belt was clearly adopted more widely. This example could be a more broadly official 'civil service' issue, rather than purely military. It seems likely, however, that their spread was wider, possibly as a sign of status among people who merely fancied that they were servants of the state. They have been found in a few female burials, which suggests that they were also worn by women.

The Caerwent belt-buckle should probably be regarded as no more than an item of dress that reveals the personal tastes of the owner. It does not directly reflect its owner's rank or even sex, although it may tell us a little about the wearer's aspirations to look like one of the 'Great and the Good' in society.

Evan Chapman

Evan Chapman is a Curatorial Officer in the Archaeology and Numismatics Department.

MINERS' MURAL - UPDATE

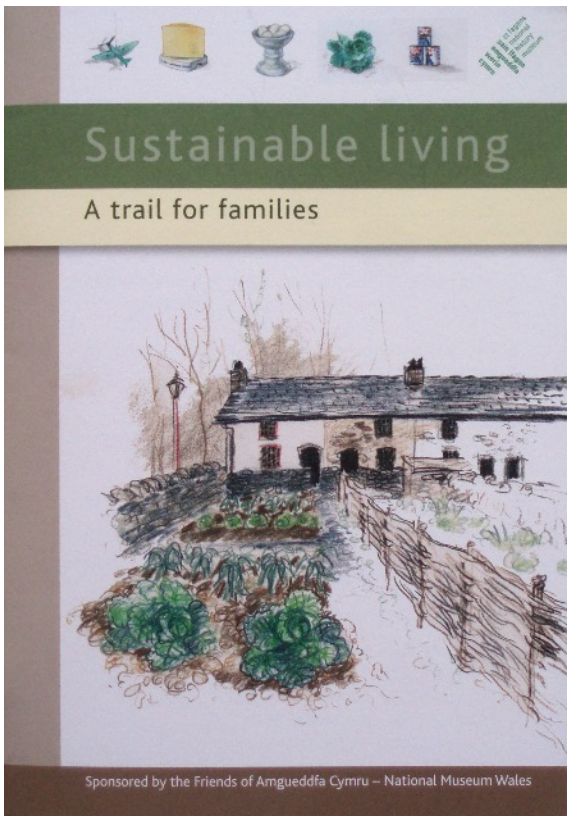
Hugh Jones, who wrote about the Miners' Mural at Llandough Hospital in the last edition of the Newsletter, has been able to give some further information about the mural that suggests its future is more secure.

It was the planning application for a new Breast Cancer Centre to replace the Pneumosilicosis Unit which triggered alarm that the wall on which the mural is situated would be demolished. However, the new centre opened in November and it appears that its opening will allow more people to see the mural because, prior to this building going up, the area in which the mural was situated was one that had restricted public access.

ARTISTS FROM THE BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION COLLECTION

Georg Dionysius Ehret, Night Blowing Cactus (*Cereus grandiflorus*) (Hand coloured engraving, 50cm x 34cm) from ***Plantae selectae*** (1772)

(See article on page 8)



FRIENDS' NEWS

On the left we are pleased to show the front-cover of a delightfully illustrated Booklet funded by The Friends. It describes a trail and activities that families can follow that will help them to explore sustainability at St. Fagans.

'Other news includes a potentially enjoyable consequence of our President Pat Kernick's 90th birthday celebrations: money collected from gifts and her own contribution (£2000 in all) will go towards the purchase of seating for the new West Wing galleries.

In regard to changes on the Committee, we are very sorry to lose Anthea Thomas (Treasurer) from the Friends' Committee. In addition Rose Marie Taylor, is retiring as Membership Secretary, although she will remain on the committee. We will be forever grateful to Rose Marie Taylor for pulling the Membership tasks into the 21st century. However, we are very pleased to welcome Anna Hughes, who becomes our new Treasurer, and Catherine Outhwaite who will take over the role of Membership Secretary. Peter Davies who is responsible for maintaining and up-dating our web-site, aims to have information of a continuous 12 month period of Friends' activities accessible to those with computers. Those without this facility will find a timetable of events with the three Newsletters (February, June and October) as well as Flyers for forthcoming activities.

MUSEUM NEWS

A Rare Glimpse of Ancient Chinese Culture

The steep hillsides of the Dazu World Heritage Site near Chongqing contain an exceptional series of rock carvings dating from the 9th to the 13th century.

The exhibition, ***From Steep Hillsides: Ancient Rock Carvings from Dazu, China*** is on until 3rd April at the National Museum Cardiff, and is the only chance to see these exhibits outside of China. It contains examples that have become detached from their original setting, along with accurate replicas of some still *in situ* and dramatic large-scale images to give some idea of what it is like to visit these spectacular places. They are remarkable for their aesthetic quality, rich diversity of subject matter and the light that they shed on life in China during this period.

All change at the Art Department

The scaffolding has long gone from the West Wing and progress continues in the creation of a National Museum of Art for Wales on the upper floor of the National Museum Cardiff and the project should be completed by the summer.

The Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings that have been touring the USA have now been returned to transformed galleries. These pictures now represent the core of new displays exploring the origins of modern art from the mid-nineteenth century to the Second World War. Other new displays include ***British Art around 1900*** and ***Modern Art from 1930 – Surrealism and Neo-Romanticism***. It is planned for one room to be dedicated to changing displays drawn mainly from collections of work by Welsh artists of the early 20th century. The first display features the work of Merlyn Evans and William Goscombe John, a leading figure in the New Sculpture Movement of the 1890s. There is also a new team of volunteer guides to help visitors enjoy these galleries. Have a coffee on the ground floor where you will find details of the day's tour on each table.

New Acquisitions

For those interested in silver, the museum has received the loan of a privately owned collection which includes objects from the Talbot family of Hensol Glamorgan, as well as pieces made for the Earl of Bridgewater by Jacob Bodendelch (1672-3).

The Derek Williams Trust collection has been enhanced by the purchase of ***An Exceptional Occurrence*** painted in 1950 by Eileen Agar (1899-1991) as well as four works by the contemporary Welsh painter Merlin James (b.1960). In addition there is, on long term loan, ***Mutual Congratulations*** by the British surrealist John Bunting (1902-1972) a man known for his sarcastic disapproval of English high society. The picture depicts two chess pieces topped by skulls: hollow, death-like upper class figures exchanging empty, mutual congratulations. The Trust also provided significant support for acquiring twenty-two stoneware pots by Hans Coper (1920 -1981), widely considered the most important post-war potter in Britain.

St Fagans Quilts at the V&A

Three quilts from St Fagans have been on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum and received mentions in reviews by both ***The Guardian*** and ***The Observer***.

Last but not least

The ***Antiques Roadshow*** was at St. Fagans in June of last year and, as usual, was presented by Fiona Bruce together with Roy Noble. The show brought in a staggering 4000 visitors and will be televised on Sunday 27th March.

WHERE SHALL WE TAKE THEM TODAY?

It's a question many parents and grandparents ask, particularly during the school holidays and often indeed on a wet weekend. One answer is to visit the newly opened Clore Discovery Centre at National Museum Cardiff, which my wife Jane and I did with our three year old grandson before Christmas. Little Rhys - that's him in the picture with his Dad - loved it.

Formerly called the Glanely Discovery Gallery, the Clore Discovery Centre opened last summer, the space having been extensively refurbished by reason of a generous £300,000 grant from the Clore Duffield Foundation.
Visitors are encouraged to get closer to the Museum's collections 'hands on' - geological objects, natural history specimens, archaeological artefacts, and items highlighting aspects of the art collection. At weekends and during school holidays a wide-ranging and stimulating programme of workshops etc is provided and while the informal ambience is child-friendly the Centre is equally of interest to grown-up's.

Grace Todd from the Museum's Learning Department was extremely helpful on the day of our visit, as was volunteer Maria Wilson. Grace played a major part with colleague Jo Langley in the realisation of the Centre.

It's on the ground floor at Cathays Park. Why not go and see for yourself?

Roger Gagg

GEORG DIONYSIUS EHRET (1708-1770)

Georg Ehret was the dominant influence in botanical art during the middle years of the eighteenth century.

His career as a botanical artist began while working as a gardener for the Margrave of Baden Durlach at Karlsruhe. Ehret decided to pursue his talent for botanical painting and in 1733 he arrived in Nuremberg where he met Dr Christoph Jacob Trew (1695-1769), the eminent physician and botanist, who was to become his lifelong friend and most influential patron. Trew asked Ehret to make large drawings for him while on his travels.

Trew insisted that Ehret, should emphasise the 'sexual character' of each plant i.e. the parts of the flower in accordance with Linnaeus's system of classification. Between 1750 and the early nineteenth century, roots virtually disappeared from botanical art, appearing only if they were of medicinal or economic significance.

In 1735, Ehret visited England with a handful of letters of introduction and met Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) then President of the Royal Society and Philip Miller (1691-1771), foreman of the Chelsea Physic Garden, whose sister-in-law, Susanna Kennet, Ehret married in 1738. He became a great success among London society counting Royalty and the aristocracy amongst his pupils and friends. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1757.

On a visit to Holland in 1736, Ehret met Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) who was staying with his friend George Clifford (1685-1760), banker and garden-lover. Clifford bought several of Ehret's drawings and also commissioned him to illustrate a book depicting the rare plants in his garden: ***Hortus Cliffortianus*** (1738).

In Augsburg, Trew published ***Plantae Selectae*** (1750-73), one of the great botanical iconographies, towards the beginning of a hundred year period that might well be regarded as the golden age of European botanical drawing. It exemplifies the coming together of three vital elements: a superb artist, engravings of the highest quality by Haid and, in Trew, an enlightened and wealthy patron.

People may never have seen the exotic fruits brought back by the voyages of discovery such as pineapple and papaya before seeing the engravings in this publication. In Linnaeus's summer home in Hamarby outside Uppsala, the walls are papered with Ehret's hand-coloured engravings, at least five of which are also in the department's collection. ***Hortus Cliffortianus*** and ***Plantae Selectae*** are the two florilegia for which he is best remembered.

The Museum holds twenty-nine loose prints by Ehret. These are mainly from *Plantae Selectae.* The Museum also holds a watercolour that is a collaborative work by Ehret and Jacob van Huysum, brother of Jan.

Maureen Lazarus & Dr Heather Pardoe

OLD CURES: AMGUEDDFA CYMRU'S *MATERIA MEDICA* COLLECTION

Nearly all medical benefits and cures come from nature. Even one of the deadliest human diseases, malaria, was first treated with the extract from the bark of a South American tree. Amgueddfa Cymru holds a remarkable collection of materials used in historic medical remedies.

The collection of 469 *materia medica* specimens was donated in 2007 by Professor T. Turner OBE, former lecturer at the Welsh School of Pharmacy, Cardiff University. It includes materials of animal and plant origin which were the traditional sources of medicinal drugs. The collection will help visitors and students who want to learn more about the raw materials found in historic medicines.

The active chemical constituents of historic medicines such as alkaloids, glycosides or tannins were released by distilling, macerating or chewing the material. Many of these components have been identified and isolated and in their pure form used in modern pharmaceuticals.

Blistering beetles

These beetles are known as Cantharides or Blistering beetles (*Lytta vesicatoria*) and are illustrated on our front cover. Crushing the insect body releases the chemical cantharidin, which is aggressively stimulating to mammalian skin and internal organs. It was found to be a successful aphrodisiac by causing irritation or stimulation to the urinary tract. It has even been successfully used on cattle to encourage mating.

Currently it is used in small doses to treat cystitis and bladder irritations. It is also of some benefit in the treatment of fluid build-up in the body (oedema), especially following scarlet fever, diabetes in its later stages and in diseases of the brain and spinal cord. It can be lethal, however, causing violent inflammation of the kidney, bladder and urinary tract. It can also attack the brain, causing it to feel as if it is boiling, resulting in acute mania and death if not treated quickly.

The Ordeal Bean: Die if guilty, vomit if innocent

The name Calabar Bean (*Physostigma venosum*) is derived from the Calabar region in south-east Nigeria, where it was used in 'trial by ordeal', notably in cases of witchcraft. Hence its alternative name, the Ordeal Bean. The bean would be ground up and placed in a drink given to the accused. It was assumed that a guilty person would nervously sip the concoction, causing certain death. An innocent person,

in contrast, would knock back the whole drink with bravado, which would generally be too much for the stomach, which would expel the poison quickly. Consequently, death was taken as a sign of guilt and vomiting as a sign of innocence.

Its medical significance was discovered in 1855 and it is now the basis of the highly important drug physostigmine, which is used to treat reduced bladder control, glaucoma and delayed gastric emptying.

Star Anise

There are two types of Star Anise: one is the commonly used Chinese spice (*Illicium verum*) and the other is the Japanese Star Anise (*Illicium anisatum*). When dried they are very difficult to tell apart, but one is harmless and the other toxic. The only way to separate the two conclusively is to conduct chemical analysis or to examine the shape of their oxalate crystals. The trees also look similar, so, understandably in the past, these spices have been combined and sold as foodstuffs.

Japanese Star Anise contains several active components that cause severe inflammation of the kidneys, urinary tract and digestive organs. Consumers have been hospitalised with neurological symptoms after ingesting excessive doses of Japanese star anise or smaller doses of products adulterated with the fruit. Cases of illness have also been reported after using star anise tea, and this may be a result of mixing up the Japanese and Chinese species.

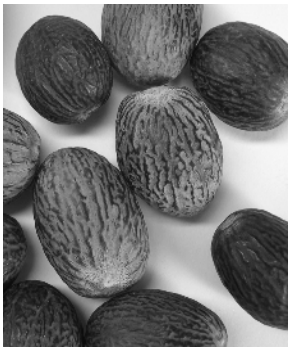
Medicinally Japanese Star Anise is used as a carminative, to relieve toothache and to stimulate the kidneys and promote urination. The leaves and seeds are also anti-bacterial.

Beaver Castor sac

This unusual item is a singular castor sac of the mature North American Beaver *Castor Canadensis*. It is also known as Castor Fibre and is similar to the anal gland in dogs. The castor sac secretes a yellowish substance called castoreum, which the beaver uses in combination with its urine to scent-mark its territory. Both male and female beavers possess a pair of castor sacs located in two cavities under the skin between the pelvis and the base of the tail.

Historically, castoreum has been used in the treatment of hysteria and menstrual cramps, and was used successfully for cardiac disease. Today, it is used in beaver trapping, as a tincture in some perfumes and is even touted as an aphrodisiac. Castoreum is also used in small amounts to contribute to the flavour and odour of cigarettes.

Nutmeg



If a plant has a shape or form that in any way resembles part of the human body, then that plant was once believed to heal that part. The humble nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*), because it superficially looks like a human brain, has been associated with powers relating to the brain and mind. Nutmeg does have psychoactive components one of which is the alkaloid myristicin which is a narcotic. Large doses of nutmeg can cause hallucinations, nausea, vomiting and circulatory collapse in just 6 hours; very large doses can be fatal.

Nutmeg is a seed endemic to Banda, the largest of the Molucca Spice Islands of Indonesia. It was highly sought for its medicinal properties (it was thought to ward off the plague), and as a symbol of wealth and opulence; a person with a handful of nutmegs in their possession in the late 1600s would have been financially secure for life. The bloody wars that ensued to control the nutmeg plantations resulted in the death of 6,000 Bandanese people.

Nutmeg has been considered to be a useful medicine in a number of Asian societies. It has been used to treat digestive problems and as an aphrodisiac; it has been claimed to combat asthma and heart complaints, and is still used as a sedative.

Tree bark to treat malaria

Some barks have been used for medicinal purposes. In Britain, the best known is probably willow bark (*Salix alba*), from which aspirin is derived.

However, the bark of the *Cinchona* tree is arguably of greater benefit to mankind. *Cinchona* is a genus of about 25 species native to tropical South America. The bark contains a source of a variety of alkaloids, the most familiar being the anti-malarial and anti-fever compound, quinine. These compounds interfere with the protozoan parasites of the genus *Plasmoidium*, which cause malaria.

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Victoria Purewal

The collection is open to the public, but currently only by appointment so please contact (029) 2057 3224 or (029) 2057 3119 prior to your visit.

Victoria Purewal is a Conservation Officer at Amgueddfa Cymru

Frances Stackhouse Acton, ***View of St Fagans Castle*** (Watercolour on paper, 19cm x 15cm, c1870) (see article on page 17)

Valentine sent to Susan George, daughter of John Christopher, in 1842 (see article on pages 12-13)

Late Roman Belt-buckle from Caerwent (Bronze) (see article on page 5)

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Portrait of Hywel Dda in ***Laws of Hywel Dda (Peniarth 28 f. 1v.)*** (c1250, vellum, 20cm x 15cm, detail) © Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru / The National Library of Wales

JOHN CHRISTOPHER - MAN OF NO LETTERS

Corinne Renshaw

Photograph of Susannah, only daughter of John Christopher, probably taken in the 1850s

John Christopher was born in 1773 in Redwick, a village on the Gwent Levels. He was a farmer with more than a hundred acres who, in 1841, employed three menservants and two women. Yet, surprisingly, he was illiterate, like his wife, Susannah. When witness at a wedding, she signed her name with an X.

They had wealthy connections. Susannah's sister, Mary, had married a very prosperous farmer, William Bennett, who owned land around Caldicot. His mother's cousin, Henry, had made a fortune as a merchant who built ships at Caldicot and in other ports for the triangular slave-trade. His son, also Henry, was Deputy Lieutenant for Monmouthshire in 1825.

The years between 1825 and 1832 were tragic for John and Susannah. First, their son, James, died, aged six, and then, in 1832, Thomas died, at only sixteen. That left John, their oldest child, another son, Philip, and their only daughter, Susannah. In 1839, Philip, aged twenty four, was taking cattle across to Bristol with nine other farmers. Their boat, the ***Rocket Ferry***, sank within sight of land, only a dog surviving by swimming ashore.

That year, the Chartists marched on Newport. John Christopher could not read their pamphlets which set out their aims of greater social equality, partly by extending the suffrage to the lower classes. He would have heard only vaguely that their objective was to end political corruption and the financial extravagance of the aristocrats and capitalists. John Christopher's sources of information were conversations in Newport market and the local inns, or with his family and friends, sources that were unlikely to sympathise with the Chartists, whom many of them regarded as a threat to their persons and ways of life. It did not help that rumours and counter-rumours arose about the behaviour of the Chartists, embroidered by exaggerated reports of fighting, thefts and worse. Carlyle, interested in reform, was worried that the activities of the Chartists would "*break out into brick-bats, cheap pikes and splutterings of conflagrations.*"

John Frost, one of the local leaders, made a speech in Pontypool, railing against the extravagances at Court. Most of the Chartists were not against the monarchy, but it seemed to the local gentry that Frost was a Republican, a traitor to the state of sorts. He was a Newport man, a tailor and draper, deeply interested in the works of Thomas Paine and William Cobbett and very concerned about social inequality. He was well-known in the town and had been mayor in 1836.

To Susannah Christopher, the reports that the Chartists were on the march from the Valleys towards Newport were alarming, but their actual aims would not have affected her, even suppose she could have read them or taken part in discussions. They concerned only males. All the same, one of the people involved in the Movement in England was Anne Knight (1786–1862) who wrote the first pamphlet in favour of women's suffrage at this time. She also complained about the chauvinism of some of the male leaders.

When the Chartists arrived in Newport some were taken prisoner and incarcerated in the Westgate Hotel, guarded by soldiers and Special Constables. When the others gathered outside and demanded their release, the military fired on the crowd, killing several people and wounding fifty. The remainder of the Chartists were rounded up and imprisoned.

When the trials began, Zephaniah Williams, William Jones and John Frost, as the leaders, were indeed accused of being traitors, the punishment for which, if they were found guilty, was horrendous. They were to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

When John Frost's trial began, among those called as jurors were John Christopher and his two nephews, Charles Bennett, a blacksmith and farmer from Port Skewett, and Philip Bennett, who ran one of the family farms at Penhow. There was no reason stated why Charles was not included in the final choice, but Philip was challenged by John Frost himself, on no apparent grounds. Their Uncle John was chosen.

With the trial well underway, Mr. Geach, Frost's solicitor, in the absence of Counsel, appealed to the Court that there

were grounds upon which they intended to move for an arrest of judgement. There was a juryman unable to read and write who had answered to the name of Christopher John. The real name of the juryman was John Christopher whose name was also on the list. Against any person answering to the name of Christopher it had been agreed to object, but with regard to Christopher John, they had not succeeded in obtaining any information and they had not felt justified in objecting to the person answering to that name when he had been called. The Court decided that the only time an objection could be made was when the jurymen were sworn in. So the trial continued.

John Christopher, in his sixties, was confused and overwhelmed by the strange circumstances of being in Court and having to take part in such an important trial. Doing his civic duty, he was made to look a fool when there was a muddle over his name, and suffered the humiliation of his illiteracy being exposed so publicly. A respected farmer, he was living unexceptionally in a quiet part of the country until he was suddenly picked out by the unforgiving spotlight of public life.

John Frost was found guilty with the other two, Williams and Jones, and condemned to death. At the beginning of 1840, however, there was a public outcry, and many Chartists, including people like Anne Knight, petitioned Queen Victoria to spare their lives. As a result, the sentences were commuted to transportation to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania). After a few years, the men were pardoned. Williams stayed in Australia and became a wealthy mine-owner. Jones also remained there and carried on his trade as a shoemaker. After visiting America, Frost returned to his wife in Bristol and lived into his nineties.

There are no visual records of John Christopher, apart from the inscription on the family tomb in the churchyard at Redwick. However, there is a sampler, embroidered in blue and bearing the name of his daughter, Susannah, made in the 1830's when she was a child, and a Valentine sent to her in 1842 when she was twenty (see picture). So, Susannah could read and write, and she was able to embroider – a sign of a family where the women had leisure. Her parents could not have taught her, but they had friends and an extended family and her parents saw to it that their children did not labour under the same disadvantage as they did. There is also a photograph of Susannah, taken in the 1850's, judging by the crinoline she wears, when she was married to George Knight, her cousin, and grandson of her Aunt Mary Bennett. (see picture).

John Christopher died in 1842 and his wife twenty years later. He was my great-great grandfather.

Information about John Frost's speech in Pontypool and the position of the Chartists regarding the monarchy is from an article by Paul A. Pickering in ***History***. That about the trials is from ***The Chartist Riots in Newport***, (printed by W. H. Johns at the "Star Offices", 1899) so may well contain inaccuracies being published so long after the events happened. However, the account of John Christopher's small part has a ring of truth.

MEDI 1966: PAN NAD OEDD GWENT YNG NGHYMRU

Agorwyd Pont gyntaf Hafren ym Medi 1966, a minnau'n disgrifio'r olygfa ar y Teledu ar ochor Cymru. Cyn y seremoni, daeth ataf ŵr bach hunan-bwysig mewn gwisg grand a medalau dirif, gan ofyn imi beidio â chyfeirio at Sir Fynwy fel sir Gymreig. Pwy ydoedd ond y Capten Roderick, Arglwydd Raglaw Sir Fynwy. Roeddwn wedi blino gymaint ar glywed a gweld yr ymadrodd "*Wales and Monmouthshire*" ar hyd y blynyddoedd nes fy sbarduno gan Roderick i gyfeirio'n fân ac yn fynych yn y rhaglen at Gymru, ac at sir Fynwy fel rhan naturiol a swyddogol ohoni.

Cofiais am y gyfrol felltigedig a gyhoeddodd Arthur Mee ym 1951 am Sir Fynwy yng nghyfres ***The King's England***. Medd y broliant, "*This is English, this is ours!*" Melltithiais y gyfrol, gan ddiawlio geiriau nawddogol yr ail baragraff: "*The county is largely Welsh in character and affinity, and for many purposes is still linked with Wales.*" Cyfeiriai at y bobol: "*...neither wholly Welsh nor wholly English*", a'r cyfan yn trin nodweddion y sir fel rhai ffug werinol.

Bu dilyniant hapus i'r hanes pan dderbyniais wahoddiad i adrodd cerdd o'r Maen Llog yn Seremoni Cyhoeddi Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru 2010 yng Nghylch yr Orsedd yng Nglyn Ebwy ar Sadwrn 27 Mehefin 2009. Pwy a eisteddai o'm blaen ym mhlith y seddi 'swyddogol' y tu allan i Gylch yr Orsedd ond Arglwydd Raglaw presennol Gwent! Ni allai dim roi mwy o fwynhad na chyhoeddi hen hanes 1966 mewn cerdd a seiliais ar yr hen fesur Triban, gan wybod bod dyddiau Roderick y 1960au wedi diflannu fel niwl y bore, a'i olynydd yn un ohonom ni yn ein cynulleidfa.

Havard Gregory

POETRY CORNER

NAIN

The dendritic veins, like Danube, blue,
set with islands of liver spots, brownish hue.
Hands palsied, shaking out of control.
Memories fading fast, yet crystal clear,
of things that happened full fifty years
ago.

Nain, Nain, how did this happen to you,
who,
was always strong, my vicarious strength.

Now the roles are reversed.
You are my nain and plenty.
But time is passing on,
And soon you will be gone.

OUR SEASONS

How fortunate I was,
That I should meet her in the Spring.
How wonderful she was,
In me love bells did ring.
And we did walk and we did sing,
Her joyous laughter out did ring,
There in the Spring.

How wonderful it was,
that we should walk side by side,
in the summer hand in hand,
her beauty matched the flowers of the land.
And we did dance and sing,
In an age of romance,
There in the summer fair.

My love for her grew more each day,
As we did stroll in leafy glade.
The Autumn glow around her played,
Her beauty was by nature made.
And we did cling
as ivy on the tree,
In the Autumn you and me.

How serene she looks today,
As now in Winter once again.
Hand in hand we slowly wend our way,
Towards a future we know not when.
And we do look and touch,
A gentle sweet caress,
In Winter, ah, that's the best.

Jack Bailey

LETTERS

Biodiversity and Sustainability

I read with interest your article on sustainability and biodiversity, which focussed in particular on the example of the harm done through ignorance in the historic use of the chemical DDT. This resonated with me for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, for the last four summers I have been one of the volunteers working at the National Museum Cardiff with the RSPB, showing visitors and passers-by the peregrine falcons nesting next-door on Cardiff City Hall clock tower. One of the main stories we have to tell people is how the use of DDT in pesticides almost wiped out the species in Wales half a century ago. Birds of prey being at the top of the food chain, it accumulated in their bodies, resulting in sub-standard eggs being laid. Since the chemical was banned, the peregrine - the fastest animal on Earth - has recovered and begun to appear again in our cities.

A second reason for my interest is that one component of my day job is to keep a watching brief on the progress of the ground-breaking new European Chemicals law for the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals (REACH) which aims to address our lack of understanding of the hundreds of thousands of chemicals produced by humans. It requires manufacturers and importers to provide data on chemical hazards and uses to the new European Chemicals Agency in Helsinki, and pass the right information down the supply chain to ensure their appropriate use. One of its main aims is to identify persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals in order to phase them out so that experiences such as that of DDT are not repeated in future.

To close, I would like to draw your attention to something that I thought may interest Friends, given the sustainability and biodiversity article and that on the career of Pat Kernick, which mentioned that the Museum once featured living plants and animals. This is no longer the case of course (peregrines excepted), and to find living nature we must look to our nature reserves. But there are more of these within the city environment than one might think.

I was astounded to stumble across the Howardian Local Nature Reserve, tucked away in Pen-y-lan, just two miles from the National Museum Cardiff. Founded in 1973, jointly by Cardiff City Council and a dedicated Friends group born from the Natural History Society of the then Howardian High School, it has metamorphosed from being the site of an old rubbish tip into an urban oasis of woodland, meadow, ponds and reedbeds, with a thriving dormouse population and various rare orchids. Over five hundred individual species have been recorded by the Friends, and these and its newsletters can be viewed on its extensive website: www.howardianlnr.org.uk. I would commend both the reserve and its website to all Museum Friends interested in nature and biodiversity.

Martin McVay

Brenda Chamberlain on Bardsey Island

As a regular visitor to Bardsey and an admirer of Brenda Chamberlain's work, I was fascinated to read Diane Davies' article in the latest Friends' Magazine. Hugh Jones' item on the Llandough Miners' Mural also intrigued me.

While on Bardsey Brenda Chamberlain lived in the house called Carreg, and there painted studies for her pictures on the house walls; and with Jean Paul van der Bijl, her partner, filled one wall with a remembrance of a holiday in the south of France. These murals, an important part of Bardsey's heritage, have, over the years, suffered from damp and neglect. And as I write, the holiday picture is bubbling, flaking and falling to the floor.

The two articles mentioned above neatly link my and Luned Meredith's current campaign to get the Carreg murals conserved and maybe restored. Luned is a member of the Bardsey Island Trust Council.

So far a conservator has visited Carreg and given us an assessment of what needs to be done. Tenders are to be issued, grants applied for and advice sought. We have set up a bank account: Brenda Chamberlain Carreg Murals. Encouragement, Brenda Chamberlain stories, helpful hints, money – all are welcome.

In a future issue of the Magazine, maybe I can tell you more about the murals and our progress in getting them conserved.

Peter Lockyer•

Editors' note: We have included above a detail from the holiday picture showing its present state. If you feel you can help, contact Peter Lockyer. His addresses are: 81 Mickleton Road, Coventry, CV5 6PP or peter.lockyer81@tiscali.co.uk.

FOSSIL REPTILE FROM PENARTH

In 2009, the Geology Department at Amgueddfa Cymru acquired a new Welsh ichthyosaur skeleton which had been found preserved in the cliffs on the South Wales coast.

Individual ichthyosaur bones and teeth are relatively common fossils in South Wales, Dorset, and Somerset, as well as parts of the Midlands and Yorkshire, but complete or partially complete skeletons are rarer. This specimen, discovered at Penarth, includes the underside of the head and one of its paddle-like limbs, as well as part of the shoulder blade and several ribs.

To prepare the specimen for display, hours of delicate and skilled work had to be undertaken to carefully remove the rock covering the preserved reptile bones.

Two hundred million years ago, in the early Jurassic period, South-east Wales was covered by a warm shallow sea, teeming with life. One of the major predators within these waters was the ichthyosaur, an extinct marine reptile that looked similar to a dolphin. These animals could reach over 15m in length, and preyed upon small fish and other marine animals such as ammonites and belemnites. After it died the animal would have been buried in the sediment on the sea bed, preventing it from being completely scavenged by other animals.

This skeleton will help in our understanding of Jurassic life in Wales and to see it visit the ***Evolution of Wales*** exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff.

Cindy Howells

Cindy Howells is the Collections Manager (Palaeontology) in the Geology Department.

The remains of the ichthyosaur after preparation for display

HYWEL DDA

Frank Lane

Bede records his view that: "*the Britons for the most part have a national hatred for the English".* He wrote this in 751 AD, less than forty years before Offa built what has been called, "*the greatest public work of the Anglo-Saxon period",* probably between the years 784 and 786. One result of the Dyke was that Wales became clearly identifiable as a political, though not a single political, entity. From this time, for many years, Wales would be free, though not entirely free, from English influence. Within eighty years of Offa's death, the various Welsh tribal kingdoms collapsed, and Rhodri Mawr, the only Welsh king to be known as *The Great*, ruled most of Wales from 878. His grandson, Hywel ap Cadell ap Rhodri, also ruled most of Wales, apart from an area in the south-east, by the time of his death in 950, and was given the soubriquet of *The Good* for the codification that has come to us as ***The Laws of Hywel Dda***. As John Davies points out, it would be wrong to consider Hywel's "*goodness to be innocent and unblemished".* Hywel's title of *The Good* does not have any moral or political significance. In the 10th century a certain ruthless dedication was a necessary qualification for a king, and there are some stories which suggest that he had this quality. However, in an age of violence, Hywel appears to have brought some peace and prosperity to his kingdom and, in an era when life was very cheap, this was a situation appreciated by the majority.

Hywel is known to have visited the court of Athelstan on numerous occasions and acted as a witness to several charters. He may have conceived the idea of codifying Welsh laws from his knowledge of events on the Saxon side of Offa's Dyke, for Ide in the late 7th century, Alfred in the 9th and Athelstan in the 10th, sought to bring order to their kingdoms by producing a code of laws detailing the social structure that was the basis of their society.

Such, also, were the Laws of Hywel Dda. They were not, in the main, laws as we know them but were statements of the human and material values of society, in matters concerning the status of its members. The structure of society was pyramidal: at the top was the king, and immediately surrounding him were his family and the officials of his household. So the first part of the Laws referred to the court; every member of the court, from the king down, was given a *sirhaed,* the price for damage or insult to be paid by an offender. The officers of the court, twenty-four of them, from the Captain of the Household to the Queen's Candleman, were listed, and each had his *sirhaed,* his duties and rewards clearly defined, as well as his rights where others are concerned. After these came the lesser officials, including the bakeress and the laundress; these latter two each had a *sirhaed* of one third of her husband's, or one half of her brother's if she were unmarried, and this was the value for all women.

The Laws dealt in detail with the position of free women in society. They were more free than in many of the contemporary societies of Europe, but laboured under the considerable disadvantage that they were thought to be weak and in need of protection, for which they constantly had to pay. Yet they could own property that could not be taken away from them.

Land was the symbol of status, and was the real wealth. No-one could dispose of his land, other than by an annual lease, without the permission of his lord. Timber and animals (wild and tame), all had their value. There were rules on ploughing and on penalties to be paid for animals straying onto crops and damaging them. Value was given to every instrument and animal that would be used in an agrarian economy and relationships and contracts were specified. No court actions could be pursued from 9th February to 9th May, when land was being ploughed, nor from 9th August to 9th November, lest the harvest be interfered with.

What we would call criminal laws, particularly regarding crimes of murder, violence and theft, listed nine ways in which a person could be an abetment, or accessory, to the actual crime and each carried a financial penalty. Fines levied were apportioned to the injured party, or his relatives, in proportion to their place in society. There were nine persons who, in appropriate circumstances, were to be believed: these included an abbot between two of his monks, a father between two of his sons and the ninth was a thief at the gallows, when he was certain of being hanged.

The Laws give us a vivid picture of life of the upper classes in the 10th century. They tell us virtually nothing of the lives of the majority of the population who were little more than slaves, or later *serfs,* and had few rights. The Laws gave a *villein* only three things that might not be taken away from him: his trough, his threshold and his firestone. The stagnation of social development was illustrated by the fact that, nearly three centuries later, ***Magna Carta*** also only gave three rights to the labourers. The reality of this society for the lower classes is briefly, but vividly, evaluated by Gwyn Williams, who points out that "*society was built on the bent backs of the unfree".*

The historical importance of the Laws is that they give historians a view of the structure of contemporary society. They show that, by 950, medieval Wales was, to a great extent but not fully, a political and national entity, with the basis of a legal system and with a literary language that were the same in essence across the whole of Wales. Hywel certainly did not make these Laws. What he did was to collect, classify and apply nationally, mainly existing local customs; in doing so, he moved Wales further along the road to existence as a national entity. There is a story that, after the Laws were promulgated at a meeting at Ty Gwyn a'r Daf, the modern Whitland in 928, Hywel went to Rome to receive the approval of the Pope for his Laws, but this is not accepted by all historians. Although to the present writer it seems a reasonable assumption that this was the purpose of his journey, if such a journey took place.

When all the legend, all the guesswork, and all the invention, are stripped from the life of Hywel, there remains the fact that the Laws existed, and that the earliest manuscripts attributed them to him. The Laws may not have held sway in the whole of Wales at any one time, but there is little reason to doubt that they represented an effort to bring together all that was found acceptable in the laws of his kingdom and its sub-kingdoms. In doing so they defined, and so brought stability to, the social structure of society. Here they differed from the Domesday Survey of William I, which aimed at telling the Conqueror details of the land he had conquered and the income deriving from it, and differed also from ***Magna Carta***, which was drawn up in 1215 by the top class of society specifically to curtail the powers of the king, and which over the following three hundred years was re-affirmed by various monarchs, each time in exchange for agreed taxation.

When, Reader, you next travel beyond Carmarthen and St. Clears, on your road to Haverfordwest or St. Davids, and come to the Whitland by-pass, instead of taking it, turn left onto the old A40 to Whitland. At the bottom of the hill turn left and left again, and on your left visit the rather attractive monument in the form of garden areas based on the divisions of the Laws, and enriched by relevant symbols. It is a memorial on the believed site of where, probably on 29th July 928, Hywel propounded the Code of Laws that survived after the last Welsh Prince of Wales, Llewelyn ein Llyw Olaf, was killed by mercenaries of the English King near Cilmeri in 1282. They remained effective until Henry VIII's Act of Union of 1536 which sought to absorb Wales into its eastern neighbour.

It is fitting that a representation of Hywel Dda is to be found among the idealised statues of Welsh heroes that today grace the marble hall of City Hall in the capital city of Wales.

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

We are pleased to include on page 10 a charming watercolour of St Fagans Castle painted in the mid-19th century. It is interesting as a historical record of the castle when it was still part of the estate of the Earl of Plymouth. However, the story I want to tell is about the artist: Frances Stackhouse Acton (1794-1881).

Hers is a remarkable story in its own right. During her life she was an archaeologist, architect, artist, gardener, philanthropist as well as a wife.

She was born Frances Knight and grew up at Downton Castle, Herefordshire built by her great-grandfather, the ironmaster Richard Knight. Her father was Thomas Andrew Knight FRS, a noted botantist, who conducted horticultural experiments in the grounds of Downton Castle (the parkland is now a National Nature Reserve). Growing up there meant she came in contact with visitors such as Humphrey Davey, the scientist, Elizabeth Vigee-Lebrun, the artist, and Joseph Banks, the botanist.

When she was eighteen she married the wonderfully named Thomas Pendarves Stackhouse Acton. Acton was added when he inherited the estate of Acton Scott near Church Stretton in Shropshire. However, he died in 1835 shortly after inheriting the estate which consisted of Scott Acton Hall as well as farms and villages. (One of the farms was Scott Acton Farm which is now a living-museum of Victorian farming and which has featured on TV particularly in the BBC series ***Victorian Farm*** televised in 2009). Frances and Thomas had no children so she inherited a life interest.

Free of the shackles of wifely duties she began to explore her talents. In 1844 she excavated a Roman villa that had been found on the property, uncovering a mosaic floor and a fragment of wall painting as well a bath-house with a hypocaust heating system. She faithfully recorded all her finds with a series of drawings of the excavations that are still highly thought of by archaeologists today.

She was also interested in architecture. She began to renovate and improve buildings on the estate. She had new lodges built as well as rebuilding workers cottages in stone. In 1866 she oversaw the construction of a new school building and teacher's house which she financially supported.

She was generally fascinated by old buildings and this spurred her to write ***The Castles and Mansions of Shropshire*** which was published in 1868. It has the charming if somewhat morbid dedication:
"To/ Sir Charles Rouse Boughton, Bart./ And to His Sisters,/ This little Work is dedicated in remembrance/ Of many years of/ Happy and Affectionate intercourse, by One, who like many of the/ Old Houses will soon have passed away."

It also led to sketching tours of Wales and Northern England particularly between 1865 and 1871. It was during that period that she visited St Fagans and made a number of sketches of the castle. The one we have shown is unusual in that it contains cows and a drover. Her main interest tended to be the buildings themselves and she often left any human figures unfinished.

She was undoubtedly a pioneering woman of her time taking up role after role that would have then been considered exclusively a male preserve. I doubt that she saw herself in the forefront of the fight for women's rights but she clearly refused to be subsumed into the role of grieving widow and took instead to exploring her talents which turned out to be considerable.

Diane Davies

Sources: Mainly C R J Currie (Editor), ***History of the County of Shropshire Vol 10*** (1998) at www.british-history.ac.uk but also from Wikipedia, www.discovershropshire.org.uk, www.shropshire.gov.uk and www.archive.org.

LIDOS AND PUBLIC BATHS IN WALES

Gill Drake

When I was a child, my family and friends spent many happy hours at the Knapp Lido in our home town of Barry. When this eighty year-old pool was demolished in 2004, I, along with many others, was saddened by its loss. I became curious about the history of the Knapp and was surprised to discover that there had been thirty or so open-air pools of its type in Wales, and that the Knap had become one of the last. Where had all the other lidos gone?

Wales seems to have been popular with swimmers since at least the eighteenth century. In 1799, Barmouth was described as *"the resort of much company in the bathing season"*. Between then and the health-boom, sun-worshipping heyday of the lido in the 1920s and 1930s, there were several forerunners and variations on the theme of "an open air pool with amenities" which defines the term. These included Siliwen Baths, Bangor (*c* 1859-1958), a tidal pool on the edge of the Menai Straits with changing rooms, where one could indulge in the novelty (in 1901) of mixed bathing. Only the caretaker's cottage remains on the site today.

More modest examples of tidal pools, such as the children's pools at Porthcawl and Barry Island, were also constructed around the coast; there must be others in existence. Inland communities also had their favourite swimming places; at Abergavenny, for example, before Bailey Park Lido (1936-1990s) was built, a stretch of the River Usk was used – complete with a changing pavilion, steps and a diving board.

Indoor pools, such as Penarth Baths (1884-1984), became popular in the nineteenth century. This building, designed by Henry Cornelius Harris (Surveyor to Penarth) and Henry Snell and now converted to housing, contained two swimming pools with changing facilities and seems to have been intended as an attraction for the wealthy leisured classes.

Later, indoor pools also mirrored some of the leisurely aspects of the lido. The one at Ogmore Vale (1923-1980s) was built by local entrepreneur Mr. Bartlett but was taken over by the Council in 1933. It used water from the nearby river, had a viewing balcony and in 1948 acquired a dance floor.

Maindee Pool, Newport (1938-2005) which was sold to a private individual in 2008, was an *art deco* fantasy with house attached. Designed in modernist style by Newport Borough Architect C.F. Ward, it featured stained-glass windows, multi-coloured underwater lights and seating for over four hundred. Its design may have had something to do with its urban setting, as few other South Wales' pools of that era were built in the stream-lined, futuristic and geometric fashion of the time. In fact, many originated primarily to promote working class health and welfare.

The 1846 Bath and Wash Houses Act, which stimulated the construction of numerous early pools in Britain, was later given substantial impetus by the work of the Miners' Welfare Commission. Early twentieth century economic depression and high unemployment, provided local authorities with a source of cheap labour. In addition, government grants and loans were introduced to encourage the use of local materials. Together these factors facilitated the boom in lido building in industrial areas. So, for example, Buckley Baths (Flintshire), although not strictly speaking a lido, consisted of an indoor pool and slipper baths and was built in 1928 by the North Wales Miners' Federation. It closed in 2005 and the building's future is, at the time of writing, uncertain.

Bronwydd Park Baths, Porth in the 1940s

In the Rhondda Valley alone, for example, there were lidos at Cymmer, Porth (1930-1992), Trealaw, Ferndale (1909-1994). Those at Porth, Trealaw and Ferndale were so similar in design, despite the differences in dates of construction, that it is likely that they were designed by the same architect, presumably the local authority architect or surveyor. Each had a rectangular pool and diving platforms with 'Edwardian-medieval' vernacular style, timber-framed buildings roofed with Welsh slate. The lidos at Porth and Treherbert were converted into covered pools in 1992.

Many pools were situated within parks. Trealaw pool, for example, was located in Garth Park which was itself designed and constructed by unemployed miners. The typical lido of the South Wales valleys was primarily a local amenity, practical and utilitarian, built to blend in with its surroundings. Cwmaman lido, near Aberdare in the Cynon Valley, exemplifies these principles in their purest form. Set within a stream, it was built by miners and remained popular until health concerns about the water caused the local authority to take it out of use.

In complete contrast, the lidos of the North Wales resorts were clearly designed as visitor attractions. Prestatyn Bathing Pool (1923) had a classically styled pavilion and a ballroom. It was constructed and re-opened as the Royal

Lido in 1960. During this era it hosted many rock concerts. After further renovation in 1985, it was covered over and re-launched as the Nova Centre.

Llandudno-Deganwy Bathing Pool (1934) was designed by Mr G. E. Marshall and Partners of Greys Inn London. It embodied: *"all the latest ideas, British and continental, for the pleasure of those who bathe and sun-bathe"* (***North Wales Weekly News*** 23rd August 1934), whilst also conforming to amateur championship swimming regulations. The pool used filtered sea water and had under-water lighting. The complex could accommodate 8,000 - 10,000 bathers, sunbathers and spectators and had an indoor cafe with sun terrace and dance floor. It was run for many years by Arthur and Clarice Brown, who introduced a small zoo, roller skating, 'funny golf', a Peter Pan railway, Bathing Beauty and talent contests, and floodlit swimming. By the late 1950s attendances were dropping and concerns about water safety hastened its closure. A housing estate was built on the site.

Rhyl Swimming Pool in the 1930s

Rhyl Swimming Pool (1930) was designed by A. A. Goodall. The pool measured 330ft by 90ft and could seat 2,500 spectators. As well as swimming galas it hosted bathing beauty contests, including "Miss Wales" in the 1960s. Used as a training quarters for an American Medical Corps during World War Two, it finally closed in 1970. An aquarium was later built on the site but all traces of the old pool have now gone.

In South Wales, Barry's 1926 Knap Lido, with its art-deco style changing rooms (added in 1937) seems to occupy a position midway between the utilitarianism of the Valleys' lidos and the aspirations of the resort lidos, as it served the local population and was also an attraction for summer visitors. Using sea water, initially on a tidal valve system, it was designed by J. Pardoe and Major E. R. Hinchcliff (the Borough Architect and Surveyor) and constructed using the work of unemployed labourers. It closed in 1996 and was demolished in 2004.

There are therefore a number of variations on the theme of a lido – but what was it like to swim in one? Michael Latham remembers Tredegar: "*In my day, the pool was owned and run by Tredegar Urban Council and the children of council employees could use the pool free of charge. The pool superintendent was Mr Bryan – he was also a swimming instructor. He always measured the temperature of the pool in the morning and posted the results on a blackboard. In the colder parts of the year he would also advise as to how long one should stay in the water".* Margaret Owen, who used to swim at Trealaw, recalls:
"As far as I am aware there was no filtration and the water was changed weekly when it was used a lot but not so often when the weather was cold. It was run on one hourly sessions, a penny an hour. We had to go out and queue up to go back in if we wanted to stay longer. Sometimes we would climb over the top when the park was closed for a free swim"!

Times change and all these pools are now lost. The 1960 Wolfenden Report on sport in the community, encouraged the building of indoor leisure centres; since then the wider availability of foreign travel, cuts in public services and increased running and maintenance costs all helped to bring about their closure. Ironically, given the reason for the development of the lido in the first place, it was concerns about health based on water quality assessment and reflected in health and safety legislation in general, that contributed to the demise of many lidos from the 1950s onwards. However, there was often a fierce outcry when this happened. Hendy Lido, near Pontardulais in South Wales, has been subject to two campaigns to save it, having been under threat since 1998. Built by unemployed labour in 1932, it was run by volunteers until 1983 when it went into local authority control. It closed in 2001 owing to a leak and the decision to demolish it was made in October 2008 because of a lack of grant money. It is planned to replace the lido with an Astroturf games pitch.

Brynaman Open Air Swimming Pool, near Ammanford, the only lido still operational in Wales, was saved by local people who formed the Brynaman Swimming Pool Association in 2002 when it was threatened with closure. The pool is now run by Carmarthenshire County Council in partnership with the Association. Opened in 1934, it was built by unemployed miners who themselves contributed to the costs. Beautifully sited in parkland, all the original buildings remain. It is built in a pleasant plain and workmanlike style, with numbered changing rooms and a cascade aerator and it uses water from the nearby river. It is open during the school summer holidays.

The only other public lido in Wales, and one of the few in Britain to have obtained 'listed' status, is at Ynysangharad Park in Pontypridd. It was designed by William E. Lowe, the Surveyor of the Pontypridd Council. The money was raised by the Miners' Welfare Fund and it opened officially in 1927. The pool itself is of a slightly irregular shape, with buildings surrounding it on four sides. These are in an arts and crafts style with covered verandas and Mediterranean red tiled roofs. Closed in 1991, it suffered arson attacks and vandalism but was listed Grade II by CADW in 2001 and Rhondda Cynon Taff Council is now planning to restore and re-open the pool.

Editors' update: Brynaman Pool has been closed since the Summer of 2010 after Carmarthenshire Council said that damage during the previous Winter would cost at least £20,000 to repair. Whether the Council is prepared to find the money (now reported to be £300,000) to keep it open remains unclear.