

The Society's own **Bob Powell** is also to be **congratulated** on his ploughing skills.



*Bob (centre) receiving his award*

At the start of June 2007, the Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums, otherwise known as 'Alhfam', held its Annual Conference near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Attending the Conference was Bob Powell, not only Curator of the Highland Folk Museum but also long time member and Board Member of Alhfam.



*Roy, demonstrating his ploughing technique*

Attending too for the first time was Roy Brigden, Director of the Museum of English Rural Life who was initiated into some of the Alhfam traditions including being persuaded to have a go at the annual plowing competition. Using mules on a 'walking plow' this is more a furrow drawing competition, thereby allowing plenty of opportunities for those who have never got behind a plow before. Never having plowed before Roy did really well and was awarded a 'pink' ribbon for sixth place in the beginners category. Winner of the experienced plowmen for the 'Fine Plowing Category' was 'The Man In Black' Bob who improved on his 2006 third placing. This years Conference will be in Ottawa in June and anyone interested in finding out about Alhfam can contact Bob or go to the Alhfam website: [www.Alhfam.org](http://www.Alhfam.org)

Take a look at your Society's website [www.folklifestudies.org.uk](http://www.folklifestudies.org.uk)

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

[Heather.Holmes@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Heather.Holmes@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

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

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# folk life NEWSLETTER

Number 23

Spring 2008



*MUCKROSS HOUSE, Killarney*

*Designed by the Scottish architect William Burn (1789 – 1870) completed in 1843.*

## The Annual Conference for 2008

18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> September

Killarney

This year's conference will be held in Killarney from Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> September. We will be the guests of the Trustees of Muckhouse Ltd. (<http://www.muckcross-house.ie>). Set in the spectacular Killarney National Park, it is one of Ireland's most popular visitor attractions. Our programme will include a visit to Muckross House and an excursion around the world-renowned Lakes of Killarney (<http://homepage.eircom.net/~knp/intro/index.htm>).

We will be staying at the 4 star Lake Hotel, Killarney (<http://www.lakehotel.com>) where presentations of papers will also take place. The hotel offers a number of facilities including an outdoor spa and a library. It is hoped that the overall

cost of the conference will be in the region of £450 (single); £360 (sharing). Please do remember that day rates are available too. For more details on day rates please contact our Conference Secretary.

The conference themes are *Lakeland Culture* and *Recording Change*. Offers of papers and other contributions are very welcome. Please contact the Conference Secretary for further information (Steph Mastoris, National Waterfront Museum, Oystermouth Road, Maritime Quarter, Swansea, SA1 3RD

(email: [steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk)).

A booking form and list of alternative accommodation is enclosed (a more extensive list is also available on our website). Please note a **non refundable** £100 deposit must be received by **30<sup>th</sup> April** in order to secure a place.

### A free place at the 2008 conference

If you are a student in full time education and would like to apply for this free place to attend the conference please contact Dr. Eddie Cass for further details.

Email: [eddie.cass@btinternet.com](mailto:eddie.cass@btinternet.com)

### **The student place for 2007 was awarded to Cynthia Boyd**

Her enthusiastic report follows.

As a folklore graduate student hailing from St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, it was a great privilege to be chosen as the student free placement. I should relate to newsletter readers the actual context in which I heard about this: I

happened to be glancing through a professor's copy of the Society's newsletter when I noted the student free placement for the autumn meeting. Dr. Paul Smith at Memorial University of Newfoundland was kind enough to vouch for me and I was told the news that I was indeed this year's placement. Since I had never visited, toured, or otherwise ventured into Wales, I was tickled to attend the meeting. I enjoyed seeing some of the sites in and around Swansea as well.

It should be noted that I had already been planning to come to the UK in September and October in order to do research on my PhD dissertation. Therefore, I decided that I would also present a paper about my dissertation. My paper's title was: *The Prescriptive and Autobiographical Garden Writing of Marion Cran (1875-1942)*. \* Though the topic of my paper did not exactly correspond to topics typically presented at this Society's annual meetings, I was pleased to see and hear so many other presentations whose varied and fascinating subject matter greatly stimulated my interest in folklore and folklife in the British Isles and Ireland. \*

I presented a paper that spoke of the life of a British garden writer who wrote gardening books and numerous garden-related articles between 1908 and 1942. Though born in South Africa, Marion Cran actually spent the majority of her childhood and adult years in England. At the peak of her writing career, she owned a house, garden and small apple orchard in West Kent. In effect, this property called "Coggers" and the Kentish village in which Cran lived and worked was the thread that ran through all of her books. Because her books were not only about gardening but about everything from cookery to village and country life, Cran's works were autobiographical in content. Cran had enormous respect for rural craftsmen and women such as blacksmiths, thatchers, bee keepers, and herbalists. Like country life writers long before her, Cran and her work inadvertently documents folklore and folklife at a time of great historical change in rural England.

I thoroughly appreciated the chance to present my research in a positive and informal setting within the discipline of folklore and folklife. I received much positive feedback and interesting comments that will no doubt lead me on to further developments in my research and writing on Marion Cran.

A couple of personal notes that I would just like to add: As a graduate student particularly interested in

material culture, I had read many articles and books by Geraint Jenkins. I never thought I would hear him speak in person. His personal reminiscences at the meeting were a particular highlight for me. I would also like to thank Steph Mastoris for all his assistance before I came to Wales, as well as the terrifying eight minutes before my presentation in which he placed my photographs into power point. Thanks to Steph and to the staff at the National Waterfront Museum; what a top-notch facility!

**Cynthia Boyd, PhD candidate, Memorial University of Newfoundland**

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### The 2009 Conference: Isle of Man

The theme being developing for 2009 is provisionally titled 'Tourism & marketing of folk culture over 200 years'. The programme will include speakers on aspects of the Manx tourist industry, the development of folk life into tourist attractions in older more established regions, and also comparative analysis of more recent developments in the British Isles. Among the excursions pencilled in are visits to the beautiful Niarbyl Bay, the magnificent Laxey Wheel, the National Folk Museum at Cregneash and of course, trips on both the electric and steam railways.

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### The Annual Conference 2007: Swansea

#### Reviews of Conference Papers

Following a welcome from our President, Roy Brigden, the 2007 conference opened with an engaging presentation by

**Dr David Jenkins, Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales.**

*Industry and international trade in south Wales - the example of Sir William Reardon Smith*

This excellent, illustrated talk set the high quality of papers given throughout the conference. Dai Jenkins skilfully sketched the industrial background of south Wales in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, using the career of the eminent Cardiff shipowner Sir William Reardon Smith (1856-1935) as an exemplar.

treat one or more of the following themes: **language and identity; ecology and the natural world (plants, animals, birds, etc.); gender; ballads and the industrial revolution; performance and orality; broadsides and print culture.** Papers will be limited to 20 minutes. Abstracts of up to 300 words, together with requests for technical equipment, should be submitted by **\*29 February 2008** to the Conference Organiser, Dr E. Wyn James ([JamesEW@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:JamesEW@cardiff.ac.uk)). The author's address, affiliation and contact details should be clearly stated, together with a brief account of the author's career and research interests.

**Bookings** should be made by **\*29 February 2008** on the Conference Booking Form which will be found on the Cardiff University School of Welsh website ([www.cardiff.ac.uk/cymraeg/](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cymraeg/))

\*Please note the organisers are prepared to consider late submissions.

For further information, contact the Conference Organiser:

Dr E. Wyn James, School of Welsh, Cardiff University, Humanities Building,

Colum Drive, CARDIFF, CF10 3EU, Wales, UK.

Tel. +44 (0) 29-2087-4843; Fax: +44 (0) 29-2087-4604;

Email: [JamesEW@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:JamesEW@cardiff.ac.uk);

Website: [www.cardiff.ac.uk/cymraeg/](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cymraeg/)

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### Folklore Society AGM & Conference

will be held at the Warburg Institute, Woburn St. London on **4th April & 5th April 2008**, on the theme 'Folktales Revisited'.

For details and offers of papers please contact [Juliette.wood@btinternet.com](mailto:Juliette.wood@btinternet.com)

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### International Society for Contemporary Legend Research

is pleased to announce their next conference is to be held at the Camden Court Hotel, Lower Camden St. Dublin, Ireland from **7th – 10th July 2008**.

For further details please contact Paul Smith, Dept of Folklore, Memorial University, St. John's Newfoundland, Canada A1B 3X5 Phone (office) 709-737-8410/8402

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### Churches in Legend and Tradition Conference 2008

This two-day conference at the Bishop's Palace, Wells, Somerset will be held on **20th and 21st September** as the third Legendary Weekend of the Folklore Society. If you would like to present a paper or performance, please send a 250 word abstract or details to: Jeremy Harte, Bourne Hall, Spring St. Ewell, Surrey KT17 1UF. Tel 020 8394 1734,

email [JHarte@epsom-ewell.gov.uk](mailto:JHarte@epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

### Congratulations

are due to this year's conference hosts as the **The Trustees of Muckross House were honoured at a ceremony in the House of Lords**, Bank of Ireland, College Green, Dublin, on Wednesday 7th November 2007 when Mr. John Gormley, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government formally launched the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland.

The Trustees have **successfully participated in the Museum Standards Programme** and, having submitted three separate applications in respect of Muckross House, Muckross Traditional Farms and Muckross Research Library, the Trustees have now secured full accreditation for all three areas. The only other institution in the country to have secured full accreditation is the National Gallery of Ireland. In other words three out of the four awards have been won by the Trustees of Muckross House.

met Peter, too, on a number of occasions, enjoyed their hospitality, and once worked with Peter when his ability to manage and organise statistical data for a study I was undertaking taught me another facet of his abilities and skills.

Peter was for many years a highly skilled and respected medical photographer at the Lincoln hospitals but his especial interest was natural history and wildlife photography at which he excelled – and bee-keeping which he practised very effectively. He also organised and led a number of wild-life and natural history photo-holidays abroad so many have benefited from his skills. Catherine recalls Peter, spread-eagled on the ground, minutely studying insects, or plants – so she, too, pursued her own interests on occasion because Peter could be immobile, studying, recording and photographing for many, many minutes. His photographic work lives on in books – on birds, on orchids, on stoneworts and many more. He was a very unassuming man so you may have to look carefully in the corner of a photograph to find, for instance, PETER WILSON (Natural Images), but many of us have much to thank him for. Thank you, Peter, for a tiny share in a fascinating life.

**Rob Shorland-Ball (former Society member)**  
13 February 2008

#### **Tom Munnely**

Tom was born in Dublin on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1944. Like many of us, it took a while before Tom found his true vocation in life. After leaving school Tom tried several lines of work including book-keeping, machine operator in a textile factory and a store man. It was in 1964 when he undertook his first recording field trip and he was hooked!

Although he had no formal qualifications, his passion and commitment to his subject lead him into a variety of interesting and high profile jobs and along the way he was instrumental in bringing together a collection of over 1,500 folk songs. One of his earliest posts was as a research assistant for the Irish Folklore Commission in Dublin and in 1970 he linked up with three other distinguished folklorists to found the Folk Music Society of Ireland, serving on the committee for the rest of his life. At the age of 27 he became the first full-time collector of traditional music employed by the Dept of Education and in 1975 he lectured at University

College Dublin when he was employed in the Dept. of Irish Folklore.

As he spent more and more time doing recordings in the West of Ireland, he decided to move permanently from Dublin to Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare. In 1985 he became a member of the Arts Council of Ireland, where he helped to set up the Irish Traditional Music Archive in Dublin. As if that wasn't enough he also launched the Lahinch Folklore School and the Clare Festival of Traditional Singing, had lectured in every university in Ireland and also wrote extensively.

In June 2007, in recognition of his work, Tom received the honorary doctorate in Literature from the National University of Ireland in Galway. In the same year, the Old Kilfarboy Society of Miltown Malbay presented him with a festschrift, *Essays in Honour of Tom Munnely*. Tom leaves a wife, Annette and three children.

**E.M. Edwards**

### **Forthcoming conferences**

Just a reminder that the **SIEF (Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore)** Conference will be held in Londonderry, 16th – 18th June 2008.

In addition, the Ritual Year and Gender Conference is taking place in Cork 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

For further details please refer to their website [www.meertens.knaw.nl/sief/](http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/sief/)

### **38<sup>th</sup> International Ballad Conference**

School of Welsh, Cardiff University,

Cardiff, Wales, UK

Monday, 28 July – Saturday, 2 August 2008

This Conference of the *Kommission für Volksdichtung* is being hosted by the School of Welsh at Cardiff University. Established in 1883, Cardiff University celebrates its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008.

**Call for papers:** papers may address any issue of concern to scholars of ballads and traditional song, though we particularly encourage presentations that

Sir William first went to sea from his native Appledore, north Devon, in the late 1860s in the coasting trades of the Bristol Channel, but was soon sailing further afield in large sailing vessels taking Welsh rails from Newport to New Orleans and in Swansea's copper ore trade with Chile. He was later to spend many years in command of some of the famous sailing vessels owned by Hogarth's of Ardrossan before moving to Cardiff in about 1900, where he commanded a number of locally-owned tramp steamers.

In 1905 he decided to venture into shipowning and sank almost every penny he had into the acquisition of his first steamer, the *City of Cardiff*. The vessel proved a considerable success and by 1914 WRS had built up a fleet of nine ships. Despite the disruption of the war years, he continued to expand his fleet to some forty vessels in the 1920s and 30s, being the first successful owner of motor vessels in south Wales. During this period his philanthropy became evident in his opening of the Reardon Smith Nautical School in Cardiff, the backing of religious and health-related causes in south Wales and his native Devon, and most particularly his generosity to the National Museum of Wales which he served as treasurer (1926-29) and president (1929-32). A staunch Methodist, his life was a reflection of John Wesley's exhortation to "gain as much as you can, save as much as you can - and give as much as you can".

**Steph Mastoris**

**Mike Houlihan, Director General, Amguedda Cymru-National Museum Wales**

*Folk memory – the real death of History?*

This was a very visual presentation from a very experienced museum professional that explored a wide range of ideas relating to museums, what they do, and how they do it. The central point was the apparent tension that exists between a museum's traditional role of offering an historical narrative and its other function as a guardian, or perhaps more strongly as a protector and even creator, of community memory. Much of the popularity of museums today relates to the way in which they identify with their audience in the process of

projecting, commemorating or celebrating shared experiences and inherited memories. Museums are seen as appropriate places in which to remember and to memorialise. Difficulties arise where the real story – the history – is at odds with the community's memory and preferred version of events. Most spectacularly this has occurred when tackling sensitive and relatively recent issues of war and patriotism. Disagreements over the line being taken in a proposed Smithsonian exhibition a few years ago about the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Japan went to the top of the American political establishment and the reverberations are still being felt. Mike's view was that the balance had shifted rather too much in one direction. The power and the spectacle of memory have become the dominant force. Museums are doing rather too much recollection and re-invention and too little presentation of the history.

**Roy Brigden**

**Mared McAleavey, Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales**

*Oriel 1 - a new gallery for St. Fagans*

Mared gave a succinct presentation on the long and involved journey which St Fagans have undertaken in replacing the old Gallery of Material Culture, once so new and shining in 1969, with a contemporary gallery relevant to today's community.

The new gallery has had a long gestation period, involving both internal and external consultation. As a result of these consultations, the remit emerged for a 'high quality flexible display space devoted to exploring issues relating to Welsh identities in the past and contemporary Wales'. Visitor surveys concluded, unsurprisingly, that the galleries were mainly visited in wet weather and mainly by older visitors who could relate to the displays. This was certainly the case when there were no temporary exhibitions to tempt in the casual visitor.

The challenge then, was to produce a gallery relevant to contemporary Wales and the new National Museum's vision, which did not alienate the traditional visitor. Fears expressed in the Welsh

press prior to opening now must be allayed by the reality of the exhibition. Under the major theme of Belonging, subthemes are explored Voices, Beliefs, Family and Nation, and the gallery provides dedicated zones for each theme. One interesting method for involving community has been to use different authors, including poets, historians, schoolchildren and the general public, not only curators, to provide the stories told. The video clips which Mared showed demonstrated vividly the input from different schools, giving the children's responses to the collections.

Feedback from those who took part has been very positive. Those who note that there are far fewer actual things on display, can be countered with the fact that audio visual collections are now accessible. In the gallery, unaccessioned objects for handling are also there, and objects are placed in much better context than the previous object rich, but context poor exhibitions from the 60s.

It remains to be seen how easy it will be to keep up the laudable ambition to keep changing displays and maintain relevance and community contacts, but Mared described the intention to continue evaluation and visitor research. It is to be hoped that funding will allow this ambitious project to continue to evolve.

**Christine Stevens**

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**Steph Mastoris: Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales**

*Beyond the woollen mill: humanising industrial history at the National Waterfront Museum*

As well as organising the Conference, Steph was also our host this year – and, displaying a superhuman fortitude, had also agreed to speak about the National Waterfront Museum, its context and its purpose. The Museum has attracted about 0.5 million visitors in its first two years, way beyond target, but there are some who arrive still expecting to see the former Swansea City Council museum which stood here, complete with woollen mill. “Where’s the woollen mill?” is the question sometimes posed, even after the expenditure of around £34 million on a Museum which is actually

a bold departure by Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales. It is all about a large scale attempt to deliver multi-layered interpretation via new media, enabling the Museum’s curatorial team to provide a depth and span of information which has, until now, been impossible. In fact, as was pointed out, this in itself represents a triumph in the campaign to use the social history approach to “drive” interpretation at our museums.

Its precursors – the former Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum in Cardiff, and the Swansea City Council run Museum which stood on this site at Swansea – were object rich and focussed on the technical. In addition, of course, a distributed story of Wales’ industrial history was already being presented by Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales museums at Drefach-Felindre (wool), Blaenafon (coal) and Llanberis (slate). What was required, following closure of the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum, was an overarching synoptic approach to industry, and its impact, within one of the world’s first industrial nations.

A team of curators, covering a range of curatorial disciplines, worked on this synoptic approach. All were determined that this was to be a Museum of Industrialisation, not just a Museum of Industry. Generic themes such as “networks” and “community” have been developed (a total of 15 in all) providing a kaleidoscopic view of communities across Wales. Spoken testimony and history is prevalent, offering visitors a series of points of departure within an open-ended narrative – all backed up by what Steph described as “fairly modest” displays of artefacts. But this is no weakness: in post-industrial Wales, there is no longer a shared experience of work within a context which is related to objects in our collections and accordingly it is necessary to deliver reminiscence in a more thoughtful way. Past and present are mixed, using new media, in ways which encourage an understanding of civic identity and relationships in twenty-first century Wales. There is, in this, an obvious link between Mared McAleavey’s earlier paper and Steph’s paper.

**Dafydd Roberts**

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Study Day at Reading in March 2007, was believed to be the Society’s first in the Museum of English Rural Life’s (MERL) splendid new building. It afforded an opportunity for past and present representatives of rural life museums to both see the museum’s collection of carts and wagons and to hear David Viner give a progress report, as part of his 2006/07 MERL Research Fellowship, on an up-dating of the census of wagons originally made by J. Geraint Jenkins some 50 years ago.

A tour of the wagons and carts now imaginatively displayed in the new building enables both visitor and researcher to examine them in detail.

This informal study day, held in Reading provided details on the intricacies of wagon design and construction, and variants reflecting both varieties of use and the idiosyncrasies of individual wagon builders are now so much easier to discern, particularly as we enjoyed the expertise and enthusiasm of both David and Roy Brigden, who guided us round the collection.

The group was also joined by Fred Van de Geer, MERL’s conservator, who brought to bear his own detailed knowledge of the wagons and also, as a bonus, showed us the nearly completed restoration of an 1877 Clayton & Shuttleworth portable steam engine, one of its first acquisitions back in 1951 (see *Rural History Today*, issue 13, July 2007).

We were taken back to those early days of MERL in the 1950s when, but for the strenuous efforts of John Higgs, John Passmore and others who mobilised public opinion, so many wagons and carts now held in museums would have been consigned to the flames of countless bonfires, only the scrap ironwork being considered of any value.

David Viner’s census will record the condition of wagons and carts in our rural life museums (both public and private) and for those wishing to pursue further research on these iconic vehicles (a status which formed the title of David’s lecture), the recently acquired collection of James Arnold wagon drawings will be a rich resource. David’s lecture was enjoyed by a larger audience drawn from past and present members of MERL and the University. Being held at the end of the working day it became much more accessible to those unable to join us earlier.

In common with all conferences and study days, those attending were able to share common experiences and to discuss features peculiar to the various regional museums which we represented – a deliberate choice of words since we came from all levels in the hierarchy of a museum. An informal day richly packed with interest, thoroughly stimulating and friendly and which left us calling for further such study days on a variety of topics. Having just attended the conference on Private Collections and Private Libraries, at least two possible topics spring to mind!

**John Wilson**

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**Study Day 2008:  
Rural Crafts & Collections**

For those interested in the attending this year’s Study Day, which will again take place at the Museum of Rural Life, Reading, or for

**Offers of ideas for future Study Days** please contact Roy Brigden at [r.d.brigden@reading.ac.uk](mailto:r.d.brigden@reading.ac.uk) or write to Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, Redlands Rd. Reading, Berkshire RG1 5EX

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**Obituaries**

**PETER WILSON** – happy memories of a brilliant photographer

Many in the Society who have attended SFLS Conferences and Study Days may remember Peter Wilson who sometimes attended with his wife, Catherine. He was delightful and perceptively entertaining company in the bar, and often went off to pursue his own interests while Catherine studied folk life.

Sadly, I learned yesterday (Monday 12 February) that Peter has just died so this memory starts with heart-felt good wishes and sympathy for Catherine. I have known Catherine for a number of years and

diversity” (the motto of the EU). He promised to give us news of any new publications in the field and can now announce a book in English on the subject of jacket wrestling: *Celtic wrestling, the jacket styles*, Guy Jaouen and Matthew Bennett Nichols (eds.) FILA (Switzerland), 184 pages, \$15. Guy who has also sent us a summary of the book (extract below), wishes you ‘good reading’ and hopes you may contact him, if you are interested in more information about supporting traditional sports and games in your own community.

“Twenty years ago, few would have believed in the revival of traditional wrestling styles. When the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling (FILA) was created in Cardiff in 1985, the vision of the delegates was one of friendly encounter and sport linked to local culture. Pioneers from Cumbria, Wales, Brittany, Scotland and Cornwall have since been joined by Irish, Icelanders, Canarians, Sardinians, Leonese (Leon in Spain) and Austrians, with their own regional styles, dedicated to traditional play culture as a tool in shaping the future of our societies through inter-generational transmission and activities in harmony with the environment that go far beyond simple tourist attractions.

Although judo is now the best-known and most globalized among these sports, many areas in Europe and European colonies had their own versions that marked their languages and were an important event in their festive calendars. The history and rules of each are traced out here. After demonstrating how the various styles have in part led to the creation of a modern ‘free style’, the book delves into the history of jacket wrestling in Great Britain from the sixteenth century on, including its revival and promotion during the twentieth century. This has indeed converged with the stated objective of UNESCO to promote traditional games and sports as an intangible world cultural heritage.”

To order the book, please contact Guy Jaouen ([jugaje@wanadoo.fr](mailto:jugaje@wanadoo.fr))

#### SOMERSET FOLK MAP

The Somerset Folk Map, subtitled ‘Customs, traditions and glorious folk song’ is packed with information to guide visitors through the county, whether travelling in reality or in the imagination. One side of the fold-out A2 sheet introduces fourteen key traditional events that trace the course of the year, locating these on a useful road map. There is also an invitation to ‘Take Part’ in an enticing range of events from Morris Dancing to

Song Sessions, with useful details on where and when these are to be found. Somehow, enough room is found to introduce the concept of folk music to the unfamiliar, trace its outline history for four hundred years and note the Top Ten Somerset folk songs collected by Cecil Sharp. On the other side, a Somerset secret is revealed: the Singers’ Trail, which charts Sharp’s activities in the county. A selection of individual singers recorded by Sharp is introduced by photographs and fascinating thumbnail biographical sketches. There is also a complete list of singers recorded in the county by Sharp between 1903 and 1914 and useful information is provided for anyone who wishes to explore family history. Refolded, the map shows Sharp himself, on his bicycle and pipe in mouth, looking out as if to encourage the would be explorer to begin investigating. The map is the concept of Yvette Staelens, who with C J Bearman is responsible for the associated research. The publisher is Somerset County Council Cultural Service, and all are to be congratulated on an excellent resource which might well provide a model for other regions.

Copies can be ordered free of charge by sending an A5 SAE to Library Administration Centre, Mount Street, Bridgwater, TA6 3ES or tel. 01278 454604, email [arts@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:arts@somerset.gov.uk)  
[http://www.rootsquartet.com/events\\_gig.htm](http://www.rootsquartet.com/events_gig.htm)

Linda Ballard

#### News in brief

#### Report on the 2007 Study Day

#### “Relevant Icons?” - Farm Wagons



David Viner addressing the group

In a thoughtful conference programme initiative, members enjoyed a treat when David Jenkins chaired and introduced **A Conversation with Geraint Jenkins**. A skilfully crafted series of questions, elicited from Geraint a picture of the early days of the Society from a founder member and an account of his own involvement in the study of folk life matters from beginnings before and at the Museum of English Rural Life, including the seminal study and publication of *The English Farm Wagon (Oakwood, for University of Reading, 1961)* and his return to Wales, the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans (in 1960) and the Welsh Industrial & Maritime Museum (from 1979 – 1987). Geraint then returned to St. Fagans until his retirement in 1992.

Geraint also spoke of his involvement with the Society as both Editor, for many years, when he introduced the work of many researchers from these isles and beyond (the contents pages tell their own story), and as President during a period of cultural, social, economic and technical change.

It was good to hear again such an enlightening enthusiast on top form as commentator and raconteur at one of our gatherings, accompanied by members of his family.

Brian Loughbrough

#### Dr Bill Jones, Cardiff University

#### *Constructing ethnic identities overseas: Australia’s Welsh and Cornish compared*

Bill’s paper examined the impact and experience of Welsh and Cornish communities abroad, principally in Australia but with references to Latin America.

Industrialisation transformed Wales and Cornwall in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century creating labour forces with skills in the new industries. These skills were to be in demand as these industries spread across the world. From 1820 on international networks began to develop of Welsh and Cornish workers. A number of examples were quoted. Cornish tin miners and Welsh coal miners appeared in Western Australia around this time and also in Guanajuato in Argentina. The discovery of copper reserves in the

1840s resulted in approximately 16 thousand Cornish folk emigrating to Western Australia. Fewer Welsh people made this journey, but they formed the first Welsh industrial communities in the region. A smelter was dismantled in Wales and moved to Burra Burra around 1850 bringing skilled Welsh staff with it. Subsequently so significant was the Welsh presence that plans were pursued for a Welsh settlement in the area. As with many other nationalities the Welsh became involved with the gold rush.

The impact and reputation of these groups differed markedly from that of other nationalities. Neither the Welsh nor the Cornish dominated the areas they moved to, thereby avoiding the tensions which often developed with other groups such as the Irish in Newcastle. There were not only miners however, those in support services and professionals also found their way across, creating a cross section of society. Women featured prominently too, most commonly as wives who managed the household. The general process however was perceived as masculine and labour orientated, both the Welsh and Cornish had a significant impact on the organisation of labour movements in the new countries. This contrasts markedly with the Scots who were often perceived as being out for financial advantage.

Emigration did however hold out for all, the promise of better wages, better housing and progression. Understandably, Welsh mine bosses would largely favour Welsh applicants for employment, thereby perpetuating the skills of the community and maintaining its distinctive character. Language festivals were often used to differentiate communities in distant lands, such as Eisteddfod in Victoria in 1867. Outwardly this made a show of linkages, typical perhaps of first generation immigrants. However, in the long term the degree of control was limited and depended on the prosperity of the industry.

D M Dornan.

**Dr Louise Miskell, Swansea University**

*From the Baltic to Bengal: International trade and the transformation of Dundee in the nineteenth century.*

We tend to think that mass produced goods manufactured as cheaply as possible are a modern phenomenon, perhaps associated with new sources of production in China. However, Louise Miskell, in a paper based on post doctoral research at Dundee University, demonstrated that market forces demanding ever cheaper products and the pressure to continually undercut rivals were the driving forces behind the development of Dundee's textile trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Dundee produced coarse linen, made from Jute. This was used initially for clothing for slaves on the American plantations and latterly as sacking, tent fabric and for a host of other utilitarian purposes. The wars of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in particular the Crimean War and the American Civil War, created enormous demand for this type of material. The unique selling point of Dundee's fabric however was the fact that it was cheap. The downward pressure on production costs as rival producers vied to undercut one another led firstly to an impact on the landscape as producers built larger and larger mills, and secondly to changes in the demography of Dundee and its surrounding area as the industry encouraged immigration from Ireland to provide cheap labour – in particular female labour, which was the cheapest of all.

This downward pressure on costs led ultimately to Dundee's Jute 'barons' (who lived in sumptuous 'Jute Palaces' built on the proceeds of the industry) to turn away from their traditional sources of raw material (flax from Russia and the Baltic states) to a new source: Bengal hemp. Louise described how the Jute barons persisted for 10 years in attempts to convert their machinery to the new, cheaper variant. Ultimately they were successful, but the days were numbered for Dundee's Jute industry in any event, for the obvious conclusion of this process was for the industry to shift its base of production nearer to the source of supply in Bengal, in order to cut costs even further, which was what ultimately occurred. A whole class of expatriate former Dundee mill managers grew up in Calcutta, and Louise concluded with a marvellous slide showing a

reunion of Dundee High School old boys at a dinner in Calcutta in the 1930s.

A fascinating insight into an industry and its impact on the peoples and populations affected by it.

**Matthew Richardson**

**Chris Scott, Beamish-North of England Open Air Museum**

*Contemporary expressions of coal mining heritage in the Durham coalfield*

Chris began by explaining the project which provided the basis of his presentation. He has been working with local groups, in this case, former mining communities, wishing to work with banners. He believes the timing of such projects is due, in part, to an end of a mourning period for the loss of mining following the 1980s miners' strike. Additionally, the timing may simply be down to the age of those involved, who have now reached a period in their lives when they feel comfortable looking back and undertaking some assessment.

Banners have long been significant to such communities. Makers Tutill of London were (and still are) one of the most important makers of banners. Buyers would choose various images from the manufacturer's catalogues and send off to London. Images were particularly important as they reinforced the identity of the group at the time.

The annual Durham Miners' Gala began in 1871 and still goes on today. Such events help to preserve the memory and identity of the community. The illustration Chris displayed celebrated their industrial identity. Strikingly though, there were no women in the slide, less surprisingly, no women are depicted in the banners.

However, research has shown that women are depicted on some banners, though only one known banner exists depicting a named woman: the First World War nurse, Edith Cavell is on the Bowburn Lodge Banner. However, why Edith Cavell is on this particular banner is something of a mystery. As might be expected women are seen on more modern

'greatest collector of Scottish ballads and ditties'. All these roles are explored by Neat, though the last falls predominantly into the period to be covered in his second volume.

**Roy Palmer**

**Agricultural history books from France**

A recent series of books dealing with various aspects of agricultural history could be of interest to those of you in the field who enjoy a good read in French.

**Charlotte von Verschuer. *Le riz dans la culture de Heian, mythe et réalité*. Paris, Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Japonaises, 2003, 409 pp, ISBN 2-913217-08-7 (Distribution : De Boccard, 11 rue de Médicis, 75006 Paris).**

The reappraisal undertaken here of rice as the 'immutable' staple food from medieval (or even pre-historic) times to the present has sparked a profound change of thinking in the field of Japanese agricultural history.

**Yoshio Abe. *Le 'décorticage' du riz. Typologie, répartition géographique et histoire des instruments à monder le riz*. Paris, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2007, 588 pp., ISBN 978-2-7351-1072-1.**

A detailed analysis of hand and early mechanized implements for hulling rice, including the anthropology, geography and history of practices by a world expert in rice technologies.

**Perrine Mane. *Le travail a la campagne au Moyen Age, étude iconographique*. Paris, Picard, 2006, 470 pp., 27 colour plates, abundant b&w illustrations, ISBN 2-7084-0760-0.**

Covering field agriculture, gardening, viticulture, horticulture, stock-breeding, hunting and fishing, this illustration-based analysis covers tools, techniques and landscape formation in the Middle Ages.

**Patricia C. Anderson, Linda S. Cummings, Thomas K. Schippers, Bernard Simonel (dir.) *Le traitement des récoltes. Un regard sur la biodiversité du Néolithique au présent*. Antibes, Editions APDCA, 2003, 530 pp., abundantly illustrated, ISBN 2-904110-36-4.**

Colloquium proceedings. From the Neolithic to the ethnographic present, an in-depth analysis of how crops were and are processed once harvested over much of the Old World (and parts of the New), with particular emphasis on the recognition of the unique role played by the threshing sledge.

**Pierre Pétrequin, Rose-Marie Arbogast, Anne-Marie Pétrequin, Samuel van Willigen et Maxence Bailly (dir.). *Premiers chariots, premiers araires. La diffusion de la traction animale en Europe pendant les IV<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> millénaires avant notre ère*. Paris, CNRS Editions, CRA Monographies 29, 2006, 402 pp., 11 colour plates, abundantly illustrated, ISBN 10: 2-271-06426-0.**

A homage to the pioneering work of archaeologist Andrew Sherratt (with one of his last contributions) and his 'secondary revolution' linked to stock-breeding and land-clearance, this summarizes present knowledge and debate about the innovations in soil tillage and transport in the later Neolithic that transformed the European landscape.

**René Bourrigaud et François Sigaut (dir.). *Nous labourons. Techniques de travail de la terre, hier et aujourd'hui, ici et là-bas*. Nantes, Centre d'histoire du travail, 2007, 396 pp., b & w illustrations,**

DVD with historical documents, original-language articles, experimental ploughing reconstitutions, documentary films, photos and other iconography. Centered on the once widespread technique of ridge-ploughing in all its diversity, these colloquium proceedings cover many other forms of tillage (and no-till) as well as the scientific methods utilized to rediscover them and the present-day contribution of farmers still familiar with or using such techniques.

If any members or friends would like to review one or more of these books, please contact me, with thanks in advance.

**Cozette Griffin-Kremer**

griffin.kremer@wanadoo.fr

**Traditional sports and games**

Many members will recall the lively discussion at the 2004 Mellac meeting sparked by Guy Jaouen, proponent of traditional sports and games in the European federation which promotes this "unity in

conference. Elaine suggested that there was a need to tap into the local market for each conference, hence the need for an attractive day rate. Steph confirmed this. Christine suggested that greater emphasis on the training element within the conference might enable young professionals to get funding from local authorities. Was there a way in which attendance could be recognised as part of Continuing Professional Development? It was suggested that a note in the Newsletter reminding AMA mentors to advise students of the conference. There was a suggestion that a stronger material culture element with the Journal might also be helpful. Additionally could each conference focus on some local skill or craft? The format of the conference was questioned but most thought it to be about the right length. Shortening it would make it less attractive from the point of view of those who were travelling longer distances, whilst lengthening it would increase the cost to delegates. The President thanked everyone for their contributions to the debate, and drew the meeting to a close.

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## Book Reviews/Recent Publications

**Richard Bebb \*'Welsh Furniture 1250 – 1950: A Cultural History of Craftsmanship and Design'** is a comprehensive survey which explains furniture history to those interested in all things Welsh, and Welsh culture and history to those interested in furniture.

The book uses numerous case studies based on 16 years of original research. The author's approach challenges the accepted view, which has seen non-metropolitan furniture as essentially derivative. Richard Bebb places the role of the craftsman at the centre of the creative process and shows the development of a vibrant tradition which is innovative and inventive in its own right.

Published by Saer Books with the assistance of National Museums Wales and the National Library of Wales, the extensive text (pp. 825) is beautifully illustrated with over 1,500, mostly colour, plates. These are principally of pieces not previously published and also feature interiors and fixed woodwork. It includes a map, glossary, index and bibliographical endnotes. The two volumes (290mm x 240mm) are contained in a colour slipcase.

The book is on sale for £150.00 (ISBN 9780955377310), but members can obtain it at the discounted price of £110.00, plus £10 delivery within the UK (shipped via express courier). For overseas delivery information, or for more information on the book visit the website [www.welshfurniture.com](http://www.welshfurniture.com) Online orders can be placed quoting the promotional code 'Folk Life', or you can telephone 01554 890328 and ask for Serretta.

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**Timothy Neat, Hamish Henderson. A Biography. Volume 1: The Making of the Poet (1919-1953)**

**Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007. Illus., xii + 375 pp., £25**

**ISBN 978 1 904598 47 3**

Hamish Henderson was a creator and a collector of songs. The two activities were intertwined in his life, with the former probably predominating during the years covered by the first volume of Christopher Neat's biography. Henderson's involvement during the Second World War in the difficult and dramatic progress of the allied armies across North Africa, into Sicily and through Italy was a defining experience, which led both to the sophisticated poetry of *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* (1948) and to the demotic verse of soldiers' songs such as the Scots 'Farewell to Sicily', written by Henderson to a bagpipe melody, and the English 'D-Day Dodgers', adapted by him from stray stanzas circulating among the troops.

Neat provides a careful record, and elucidates a number of the mysteries surrounding Henderson's early life and education. He is sympathetic without being sycophantic. He has enjoyed free access to the Henderson archive, though this has the disadvantage of being (his words) 'an uncatalogued jumble'. It is unfortunate that Neat in his transcriptions from the archive makes a number of errors, particularly in Italian words, as indeed he does at large in his own text. Yet he has a grand story to tell.

Henderson, who died in 2002, was variously described in tributes as 'socialist balladeer', 'guiding light behind the Edinburgh fringe festival', 'staunch supporter of Gaelic and travelling people, bard of the Scottish home rule movement' and

banners, this is obviously changing the nature of the banners and is naturally reflecting changing roles of women in society. Indeed, women and children are now taking part in designing today's banners, which increasingly reflect more of a village identity rather than a lodge identity. The banner itself is terribly important, it has long been a rallying point and, Chris asserts that today is being seen as a re-invigoration of the community, even a re-integration and cohesion of the community which had been lost.

Like all curators, Chris has to balance caring for and preserving objects, like the banner collection, whilst at the same time making them as accessible to the public as possible. When Chris was approached by Esh Winning Lodge asking for the return of the banner, he entered into negotiations with them and an agreement was struck which pleased both parties. A replica banner was produced and it is this one that will be held high, with pride at forthcoming events, whilst the original can be preserved for future generations to see.

The imagery on banners often includes buildings, a good example of which is the Craghead banner. (The image is actually back-to-front, so the London artist must have had the negative the wrong way round.) The colliery, depicted on this banner, still stands yet like many former colliery buildings it is not being used. Unlike the banners they have not been taken to the hearts of the communities (perhaps though this is simply due to lack of resources). Herrington Country Park was one of the largest, old pits in the Durham coalfield, now nothing remains and yet Herrington Memorial Garden (1874-1985) does include artist representations of mining symbols e.g. the old pit wheels.

The Bowburn Lodge Project involved creating new banners for the village and the school, both of which are quite different from the original Lodge banner. The finished results show the former colliery, the banner being marched on Gala Day in Durham and strikingly includes people who are not only recognizable but who are also the driving force behind the banner's creation.

Central to such projects is that fact that Museums can be a facilitator in the creation of folk memory. Beamish engaged an artist to work with schools to create their own banners, the whole project proved

hugely successful. Interestingly, the impetus came from the local people not the museum. Beamish found there was no need to market this project at all, as the community groups were so proactive.

**Elaine M Edwards**

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**Cynthia Boyd, Phd Student Memorial University of Newfoundland**

*The prescriptive & autobiographical garden writing of Marion Cran*

Marion Cran (1875-1942), was a gardener and writer, the Mrs Beaton of the rosebed. She lived in the Kent countryside, at Coggers, a two-storied, deep-roofed, wide-eaved, timber-framed fifteenth-century house, from 1923 until her death. Yet she was modern, a journalist who was one of the first broadcasters when the British Broadcasting Company was formed. She wrote a handful of books, some of them collections of her wireless work, and after her death appeared the *Bedside Marion Cran* (1951).

'I am a writer and I use the stuff of life as it comes my way', she wrote. The central phrase is a loaded one, referring to A.E. Housman: 'The stuff of life to knit me / Blew hither: here am I.'

Speak now, and I will answer;

How shall I help you, say;

Ere to the wind's twelve quarters

I take my endless way.

This is from *A Shropshire Lad* (1896). It is relevant to Cran because she too longed for the static England of the past. She appealed to middle-class readers who wished to respond to the death and mutilation of the First World War by living in an older and simpler England, when people lived with nature. She helped her readers with gardening advice and implied a social vision. When she wrote of 'the over the fence camaraderie of gardeners the world over,' she expressed an ideal of a peaceful global community (albeit one based on eradicating slugs).

Gardening has strong oral traditions: she learned from her father who was a vicar, and from professionals and other amateurs. She stayed close to local life, growing teasles because they had been

used in the woollen industry of the Kentish Weald when her home was built. She had the journalist's skill of pointing to general truths by relating individual experience, and with hindsight this emphasis on the personal made her an ethnologist doing fieldwork.

Marion Cran was a multitalented and determined woman who judged Siamese cat competitions and when money was short, and she was well into her sixties, went hop picking. Cynthia Boyd's enthusiastic and thorough presentation did justice to an unusual and worthwhile subject. It also made the larger point that there is a great deal of ethnology to be found in good quality journalism.

**John Burnett**

### **Members' papers**

**Claudia Kinmonth, Freelance Historian and Author**

*Nineteenth-century Irish fairs through art*



*Sweet Whey, from 'The Cries of Dublin', by Hugh Douglas Hamilton, 1760.*

*With thanks to Churchill Press & Wm Laffan for reproduction permission*

Claudia Kinmonth has spoken to the society on several occasions but usually on aspects of Irish furniture. I do recall, however, that in one paper she touched on the subject of this furniture as it was depicted in paintings and drawings of cottage interiors. Nevertheless, apart from the very successful day-school which Claudia organised last year at the Crawford Gallery in Cork, this was the first time she has spoken to us about her continuing interest in Irish genre painting. I didn't manage to see the exhibition last year or hear the presentation although I did purchase the rather magnificent catalogue. Hence, for me this talk on one section of the exhibition was a great delight.

Nineteenth-century Irish fairs through art, Claudia's paper was a visual treat and she teased out for us much of the social evidence which could be found in these paintings from the setting up of the fair, to the depiction of the booths and stalls which were the main attraction. I have to say that I was on the lookout for representations of the theatre booths which are such a feature of Hogarth's Southwark Fair. The paper focussed on the culture of people visiting these fairs. There were the inevitable scenes of the drunkenness which was common at fairs all over Europe; but for me at least, these were mitigated by the sight of small children eating crubbeen from a pot; however, I think my own choice might have been the cockle and periwinkle stall Claudia pointed out.

For the social and cultural historian, genre paintings have always been a resource even if somewhat underused; Claudia brought this subject alive. A delightful paper and I look forward to seeing, and reading, more from Claudia on this subject.

**Eddie Cass**

**Linda Ballard, National Museums Northern Ireland**

*The Smithsonian Folklife Festival*

Each year in Washington D.C., the Smithsonian Institution promotes a Folklife Festival, a large, international event. For nearly two weeks in June and July, Washington's National Mall is given over to this celebration of folklife and culture. Whilst the event is aimed at an American or tourist audience, it is not intended to reflect a purely American culture;

there was no financial benefit in this. She had also investigated using colour photographs, but this would push the price up too much. Sending the journal out by email had been discussed, but only one response had been received to this proposal so it was shelved. Tom Munnely had died recently, and the next Newsletter would contain an obituary. Elaine ended by asking for any other news items, any contributions to be received by 23 November 2007.

### **Website Officer's report:**

The website officer was not present but had submitted a written report which thanked Eimar Ballard for updating the website. Work was underway to establish a network of links to & from other sites.

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

Eddie reported that some years ago Steph had been approached by Peter Kennedy who was hoping to establish an archive for his material. This has now gone to Halsway Manor so our link with this matter was now at a close. Eddie had had an email from Liz Rosindale to say that she was moving on to a new post at Maneys but that they were still interested in publishing our journal as opposed to merely printing it. It was suggested that we should meet the new representative of the firm prior to the officers meeting in January 2008. Eddie also reported that he and Linda Ballard had hoped to get back copies of the Journal posted on the JSTOR website. The Folklore Society had found this to be financially rewarding. Linda had initially approached JSTOR, but their position was that at that time they were not looking for any more journals in this area. At a JSTOR Workshop in London, Eddie had spoken to Mike Spinella, the Executive Director, who had promised he would look into it again but nothing more. Eddie would report back to the officers meeting.

Study Days – Sarah Blowen was happy to host a study day in her area if someone could come up with a topic.

### **Membership Secretary's report:**

Seb Littlewood thanked everyone for the help he had received this year. He confirmed the downward trend in membership. The Society had 161 individual members and 161 institutional members. Institutional membership was declining faster than

individual membership. Seb reiterated the urgent need to bring in new members.

### **Conference secretary**

Steph Mastoris said that he hoped everyone had found this year's accommodation satisfactory. He requested that the evaluation forms be returned as these helped to plan future conferences. Next year's conference will be at Killarney, 2009 Isle of Man and 2010 Weald & Downland Museum. Member Paul Coughan asked if the IOM conference could be tailored to fit ferry sailings from Dublin, to enable Irish members to attend. Steph ended by commenting that organising a conference is a risky business financially. This year we had only just achieved the critical mass needed to make the conference work, and it tended to be a hard core of people who attended each year. The society needs to target new blood if it is to survive. The Killarney conference was in a wonderful setting with excellent excursions planned. He hoped members would help the organisers by booking early.

### **Election of Officers**

All officers had agreed to stand again with the exception of Eddie who was to hand over to Matthew Richardson at the 2008 conference; in the meantime, he and Matthew would work in tandem. The officers were accepted by the AGM.

Two members were due to leave the Council (Claudia Kinmonth & Christine Stevens) but four new nominations had been received, Bob Powell, John Burnett, David Viner and Mared MacAleavey and all were duly elected.

### **Any Other Business**

Eddie Cass reported that the free student place was a conference feature which was set to continue. There was a suggestion from the floor that the recipient of the free student place should automatically become a member of the society for one year. Cozette suggested that there was a lot of cross-over with work that archaeologists were presently undertaking and advocated encouraging more to join. Seb Littlewood raised the suggestion of a student membership rate, in the hope that students who were thus encouraged to join would in time become full members. Paddy MacMonagle suggested that Irish historical organisations might be good recruiting grounds and suggested that all Irish local authorities be notified of the Killarney



*Steph and Dafydd enjoying a visit to the Swansea Museum Stores*

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

Held at 4.30pm on Saturday 15 September 2007 at the Marriott Hotel, Swansea.

**Present:** The President (Roy Brigden) and 25 members

#### **Apologies:**

Apologies were received from Andrew Mackay, Bob Powell, Peter Brears, Trefor Owen, John Baldwin, Shane Lehane, Gavin Sprott

#### **Minutes of the last AGM:**

These had been printed in the Newsletter and further copies were tabled. They were adopted by the meeting as a correct record.

#### **Matters arising:**

None

#### **President's Report:**

The President noted that the 50<sup>th</sup> AGM was rapidly approaching and invited suggestions as to how to mark the occasion. He went on to state that the conference this year had been a pleasure to attend and thanked Steph Mastoris & his colleagues for their work in organising it. Looking back over the year just gone, Roy noted that the journal was still the flagship of the society. The latest issue maintained the very high quality of previous issues. The Newsletter was also splendid. The Website had been modernised and now has a message board. Roy asked members of the society to make use of it.

The admin. side of the society was also ticking over. On the subject of the Study Day, Roy commented on the success of David Viner's talk on wagons in Reading and requested other ideas for study days. One major cause for concern was membership, which was effectively falling. Roy invited each member to recruit one new member. This was necessary if we were to reverse the downward trend, and if events such as the conference were to remain viable. Not wishing to end on a pessimistic note, Roy commented that the society still embodies a rich mixture of people successful in many different fields. He went on to report on ALHFAM conference (Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at which member Bob Powell had won the ploughing match. There was more good news in that at next spring's SIEF (International Society of Ethnology and Folklore) conference in Northern Ireland, the society would be gaining good exposure thanks to three speakers – Roy Brigden, Christine Stevens and John Williams-Davies. Roy thanked Linda Ballard for facilitating this. He ended his address by looking forward to the 2008 conference in Killarney which promised to be a great success.

#### **Treasurer's Report:**

The annual financial report was presented by the Treasurer. Duncan Dornan reported that finances were still strong. However 2006/2007 had been a challenging year – the society lost £500 on the annual conference. Newsletter costs were higher. Membership subscriptions look to be down substantially but this is largely due to a batch of cheques being processed late. The treasurer commented that the society could not cover a loss on a conference on an annual basis. There was an urgent need to increase membership or look again at who publishes the Journal. The balance in the Society's account was approximately £14,000. The Report was adopted.

#### **Editors' reports:**

Linda Ballard reported on the contents of Volume 46 (supplied on separate sheet). Cozette has a strong review section. Plans for Volume 47 were in hand. 2 papers have been accepted and more are under review. There was a new editorial board.

Elaine reported that the newsletter would continue to take the usual A4 format. She had enquired as to whether a switch to A5 would be advantageous, but

international participation is both welcome and expected. In 2003, the Smithsonian Institution was asked to consider including Northern Ireland as part of the festival. Linda's paper reflected the outcome of the planning which went into the subsequent years.

The aim of the Northern Ireland entry was two-fold, to reflect a contemporary view of the culture of the province and to expand upon the role Ireland had played in American society. Pavilions carried exhibitions on crafts, foods and drink, as well as storytelling, music and dancing and sports such as hurling and Gaelic football. But larger aspects were also represented, industrial crafts such as pottery and linen making, farming and fishery.

Those of us who were at the Belfast conference will have powerful memories of the murals for which cities such as Belfast and Derry have been famous. To know that leading Catholics have attended Orange Order parades since then would have been considered inconceivable to us then. Similarly, for American visitors to the festival to see Catholic and Protestant mural painters working in harmony on their own separate, but adjacent murals must have been a revelation. If the intention of the entry in the festival was to showcase contemporary Ulster the organisers must have been delighted with the result. Similarly the museums who contributed to the event must have been satisfied at the outcome. Linda clearly was – despite all her hard work.

#### **Eddie Cass**

#### **Richard Bebb, Furniture Historian**

*Welsh Furniture: "Located beyond the routes of commerce and travel"? Development and innovation within a vernacular tradition."*

Richard Bebb studied Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics and this paper emerges from 16 years of writing and researching his substantial 2 volume book 'Welsh Furniture 1250-1950 a Cultural History of Craftsmanship and Design', which he published this year. His knowledge of country furniture is underpinned by having run an antique shop in Kidwelly, west Wales.

He began by quoting some furniture historians, such as the American author Nancy Goyne Evans whose decidedly sweeping statement forms the title of his paper. Followed by Ralph Edwards who supposedly stated that the usual 25 year stylistic time lag between fashionable fine furniture and its country equivalent, was, in the case of Welsh furniture, more like 100 years. The concept that vernacular furniture follows slavishly in the footsteps of higher class furniture, is in any case a disappointing one, but Bebb illustrated that Welsh furniture was not only idiosyncratic, but had its own characteristics which were influenced by local trades and by functional roles reflecting rural domestic life.

Images from 13<sup>th</sup> century court manuscripts showed chairs with backs which were raked and decorated, probably evolving from stools. He showed several examples of a type of turned ash chair commonly three-legged, and made exclusively by wood turners as virtuous examples of their craft. The technique gave rise to the label 'thrown chairs' and he suggests that these were a well established form on the Bardic circuit. Welsh furniture makers were unhindered by the guild system which distinguished the work of, for example, joiners from turners, as in England. A rare thrown chair from Tregib, Carmarthenshire had four legs and a special footboard, and he suggests that such forms may have originated in Scandanavia, through the South Wales Bristol channel. Continental connections were further suggested by a Herefordshire cupboard, carved with Henry VIII's coat of arms and embellished with hunting motifs that he related to c16th French costume. Thus the theme that was discussed frequently during other conference papers at the weekend, of trade between Swansea and the rest of the world was enlarged. Rich shallow carving was a feature which predominated the oak furniture of that period, with forms such as dragons and intertwining serpents, conversely setting it apart from styles found in neighbouring countries. The abundance of timber available on some estates enabled woodworkers to be employed making chair backs and legs, which were apparently sold into Lancashire and Cheshire.

The proliferation of carved embellishment gave way to what Bebb described as a 'golden period' of plainer pieces towards the seventeenth century, and as elsewhere, inlay increasingly emerged as a form of decoration by the early eighteenth century. Oak was favoured widely, to the point where it was

perhaps uniquely used to create the highly sculptural Cabriole leg, which in England was associated with finer grained woods like walnut or mahogany.

The importance of literacy, an aspect of Welsh non-conformist society, apparently fuelled the proliferation of desks and bureaux, which, by the eighteenth century, were locally made. Mahogany began to be used once its importation was established through the Bristol Channel. A surprising combination of a mahogany cabinet incorporating a small long case clock in its central upper section, was not unique, as furniture and clock-makers collaborated to produce dressers in this style as well.

Having shown furniture right up to the early twentieth century, he concluded that there was actually little evidence of stylistic time lag, that Welsh makers had access to fashionable pattern books, and that the East to West influence (assuming styles were derived from those in England) should be challenged. Yeoman farmers supported locally made pieces, and managed to create through incorporation and rejection, a distinctive Welsh form.

Richard Bebb's 2 volume book Welsh Furniture 1250-1950 a Cultural History of Craftsmanship and Design (Saer Books, 2007), pp. 806, c.1500 illus., is priced at £150.00\*

ISBN 978-0-9553773-1-0

**Claudia Kinmonth**

**Please refer to the Book Reviews section for a special offer to SLFS members.**

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**David Viner, Museum Consultant**

*Relevant Icons? Reassessing the wagon and cart collections in museums*

David Viner and I have been involved for a number of years in a project which is attempting to identify a Distributed National Collection of Agricultural Heritage items. This has involved gathering information from rural life museums and assessing the relative significance of particular classes of objects against a set of criteria, so that the most important items and collections can be recognised

and celebrated. It was therefore excellent news when David was appointed as a Research Fellow for the Museum of English Rural Life, to study in detail a subject that has long been a passion of his – farm wagons.

For the Fellowship he is reassessing the Designated collection of 26 wagons and carts at Reading alongside the network of regional collections, most of which were amassed since the Reading collection was formed. In his presentation, David paid tribute to the work of Geraint Jenkins, whose book *The English Farm Wagon*, first published in 1961, was the starting point for much of this research.

David described briefly the origins and antecedents of farm wagons and then took us on a 'virtual tour' of the regional variations of these fascinating artefacts. They were all designed for a similar purpose but the designs varied considerably to suit local needs and circumstances. The majority were craftsman-made and many of the vehicles show individual design elements within the overall pattern, showing the skill of the individual wheelwrights. Painting styles and colours also varied from region to region. David is considering the wagon collections in the main rural life museums and some private collections, assessing them in terms of regional design, provenance, conservation and rarity value, to create a nationwide audit from which it is planned to establish a Distributed National Collection of these iconic museum items.

David made the point that these vehicles are a finite resource so that it is important to identify the most significant and seek to protect them.

As with dialect, farm wagons exemplify the regional distinctiveness which existed in England but which is now almost lost. This project is timely and important as museums are encouraged to review their holdings to ensure relevance to a present-day audience. David's work will assist museums in establishing the significance of their wagon and cart collections and encourage curators to consider the educational potential of these iconic items.

The presentation was lively, interesting, and well illustrated with pictures from auction sales and private collections as well as museums. We look forward to seeing the final outcome of this important work.

**Catherine Wilson**

**Neil Lanham** followed by **Duncan Dornan**

The final conference papers reflected the range of interests within the membership of the Society. Members were pleased to welcome **Neil Lanham**, a retired auctioneer from Suffolk, who, following somewhat in the footsteps of George Ewart Evans, has studied the stories, songs, customs, costume and traditions of Suffolk horsemen. His presentation featured the **Suffolk horseman's suit**, an example of which he had commissioned and brought to illustrate his presentation.



*Neil Lanham wearing his bespoke Suffolk Horseman's jacket*

It featured raised seams, triple rows of patterned stitching and distinctive buttons bearing a horseshoe motif. Members were keen to examine the suit and commented on the disposition of the buttons in threes and fours and the alignment of the motif, which had been observed in different parts of the UK and Ireland, being open to the top, bottom and side of the garment in different local traditions. With the aid of photographs, film and song, Neil traced links with travellers' customs and recounted his search for the tailors, whose oral traditions retained in central commercial workshops, long after any surviving paperwork, had enabled him to have the handsome suit made that fitted him a treat.

In conclusion, **Duncan Dornan** from the National Museums of Scotland and Treasurer of the Society delivered what may well come to be seen as a key paper describing the approaching cusp of **change in the agricultural landscape and economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**. There are those who do not recognise "a golden age" extending from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and would see the history of agriculture as being one of frequent change in response to technical, economic, social and political developments. Reflecting on

one of the conference themes touching upon international trade and local identity, Duncan provided telling statistics about agricultural diversification, for example, the growing popularity of organic produce was both a success and a challenge; in order to meet current demand, some 65% of organic produce in the UK is sourced abroad. Other initiatives have had mixed success, with those first in the field having made some gains whereas the later comers have not fared so well. Price wars and the pursuit of short term profits are dangerous and we are currently in danger of ignoring soaring prices and production difficulties. This was a sobering and challenging invitation to all with a concern for the future of country life to consider what might shape rural society in the next fifty years.

In a **brief summary of the proceedings**, Brian Loughbrough, who chaired the last session of the conference, invited members to reflect on the conference themes of *Humanising industrial history* and *International trade and local identity* and touched upon the key questions that lay at the heart of folk life studies: Where? Who? Why? and When? Each conference offered an answer to the first and Swansea had been no exception, with excellent scene setting, interpretation and guides. The new National Waterfront Museum concentrated on the original collections and brought the latest methods of interpretation to the fore. "Who?" was answered in a variety of ways, not least by the reflections of Past President Geraint Jenkins and the remaining questions had been addressed by reference to ongoing work in the study and interpretation of historical collections in *Oriel I*, traditional furniture (so well facilitated by modern imagery) and revisiting the staples of farm transport the farm wagon and cart. So many conferences had included references to the export on customs, language and skills to many other parts of the world as result of trade and settlement. The conference had shown how and why the trades had taken place, what people had taken and retained and what tensions and new beliefs might be encountered. It had been rewarding and stimulating and members were grateful to all those responsible for the proceedings and, not least, those who had prepared and presented papers.

**Brian Loughbrough**