



# *Newsletter*

*New Year 2009*

## **The President Writes**

A Happy and Peaceful New Year to all: this will be my last introduction to the *Newsletter*. The contents show that we have started the 2008-09 session in 'good heart' and the support for many of our activities is most encouraging.

I would personally like to thank all members for my enjoyable seven years as President. I have learnt so much, met so many interesting people and, hopefully, strengthened the profile of the RISW. This has been achieved with the help from so many who contribute to the work of the Institution. It has been an honour to serve as President.

Thank you all  
Gwyneth Davies

## **RISW Reports**

### **Lecture reviews**

**11th September 2008.**

#### **St. Teilo's Church, Llandeilo Tal-y-Bont: its rebuilding and restoration**

**By Mr Gerallt Nash, Curator of Buildings, St Fagans National History Museum**

The winter lecture programme for 2008-09 began in fine form with this authoritative account of the transformation of a much loved but sadly derelict local landmark into one of the finest among the collection of significant Welsh buildings at our National History Museum. The speaker, Mr Gerallt Nash, has been responsible for that collection for many years and had been involved with the project to move and restore the ancient 'Church on the Marsh' from its inception in the 1970s. He explained that the nave of the church had been built in the eleventh century, on a site which had already been in religious use for several hundred years. Early additions included two side chapels, followed in the fifteenth century by a large aisle on the south side. In the early 1500s a fine rood screen was installed. Not long afterwards, the Reformation led to the church being stripped of ornament. By Georgian times box-pews filled the

interior and 'Gothick' style windows replaced the medieval ones. However, the building escaped Victorian restoration because a new church was built in nearby Pontarddulais to replace it. The process of moving the old church began with the careful stripping of many layers of internal whitewash, and these were found to be covering a remarkable series of sixteenth century frescoes showing biblical scenes and saints, which had once adorned the church and instructed the congregation. This discovery helped to settle the question of which period should be represented in the rebuilt building. Now the wall-paintings have been conserved in the museum building, but in the church replicas of them have been expertly created in the correct locations. Not only that, but the rood screen has been magnificently recreated as a superb piece of craftsmanship, intricately carved and brightly coloured in accordance with reliable evidence. This featured strongly in Gerallt Nash's well-illustrated lecture, and his account of how its small panels illustrated the life of St Teilo was a delight in itself.

**9 October 2008,**

**The Cambrian Company: Haynes, Dillwyn and Co's London Warehouse, 1806-1808**

**By Jonathan Gray.**

The lecturer presented some of the fruits of his recent research which will be further expanded in his forthcoming book. Some of the conclusions, he feels, may well be controversial. The London Warehouse was established in 1806. The origins of the Cambrian Pottery in Swansea were derived from American finance and much of the early production was destined for export to the American Colonies. This lucrative business was disrupted by the American War of Independence and by wars in Europe. These developments led to the establishment of the London Warehouse and with it a movement up-market with the development of lustre ware. It seems that much of this was admired but not bought! The company's move to set up the London Warehouse was partly due to a desire to cut out middlemen. The enterprise was brought to an end in 1808 and 14,000 pieces of pottery were sold in a series of Christie auctions. Jonathan examined in detail the contents of these sales which included utensils for the kitchen and the dining room, ornamental ware for the conservatory and garden, together with objects for use in the bedroom. Of the very large numbers of items in the sales the largest single group was 1572 jugs. Jonathan illustrated the array of patterns and types, including the white ware for 'ladies' painting'. To-day, the admired lustre ware is unattractive due to the degradation of the lustre. The 1808 closure was not the end of the firm's London adventures. They were later back in London with porcelain, but that is another story.

**23 October 2008, Evening Theatre Visit**

The Port Talbot Pit Explosion: *Theatr na n'Og*

Members of the RISW joined members of the Port Talbot Historical Society to see a re-enactment of the Taibach Colliery disaster of 1905 by *Theatr na n'Og* at the Dylan Thomas Theatre. The performance was followed by slides and refreshments in Swansea Museum. This was one of their evening presentations for 'older people' by this small but very talented theatre group which specializes in making history 'real' for schoolchildren, a part of the city's education programme. The re-enactment was 'atmospheric' in helping the audience to understand some of the anxieties and feelings

experienced by miners working in this colliery which had some of its seams extending out under the sea. We also received just the slightest inkling of the feelings of desperation in a community triggered by such a mine disaster. We would like to thank Gerald Gabb, Schools Education Officer at Swansea Museum, for making all the necessary arrangements. We look forward to seeing future performances by *Theatr na n'Og*.

**13th November 2008.**

### **The President's Invitation Lecture.**

#### **Repairing DNA**

**By Professor Ray Waters of the Medical School, Cardiff University**

This year's 'Invitation Lecture' was truly a report from the frontiers of modern science, but the amount of general interest aroused by the subject of DNA was evidenced by a large and particularly attentive audience. Professor Waters began with an outline of the nature of DNA, what it is, and how it determines the nature of organisms - including humans - and also of individuals within groups of organisms. He described the ongoing work of his team at Cardiff University, focussed on understanding the way in which the body was itself able to repair damage to elements of its DNA, and on ways in which future medical intervention in the process could be beneficial. The subject is one of great complexity and the speaker outlined the varied skills of the members of the Cardiff team, amongst whom the expertise of mathematicians, physicists and computer specialists was also essential in organising and presenting the vast amounts of data now being amassed. Each cell nucleus of an organism contained the DNA code which determined the nature of that organism. So much information could only be contained in such a tiny space by the two metre long thread of DNA being rolled like a ball of wool in each cell. The body had a natural ability to repair damage to its DNA, and Professor Waters explained very clearly how this amazingly complex process was carried out naturally, without disrupting the tightly coiled 'ball of wool'. If damage to DNA were not repaired in this way mutations could occur to the genes, which could lead to cancers developing. Damage to DNA and its natural repair by the body were part of life, and occurred constantly. However, if the body's repair system did not function adequately, or if repeated damage was caused by outside sources (e.g. smoking or sun-burn), then terminal break down could result. While the current research was focussed on understanding the natural repair processes, its potential for medical use in the prevention and amelioration of illness was a real prospect, though this was still some years in the future.

### **The Programme - into 2009**

The 2008 portion of our current programme of lectures and social events has gone well, with very satisfying attendances. It opens again on 15th January with an illustrated talk on one of Swansea's best-known place names - St Helen's - though the subject will be not the famous St Helen's Cricket and Rugby ground, but the nearby ancient mansion house of St Helen's House (or Castle). Some of the interesting characters who lived at the mansion will be remembered too. Our AGM is also in January, on 29th, and the relevant papers accompany this Newsletter. After the AGM business has been completed Mr Gerald Gabb, Senior Education Officer at the Museum will tell us of some recent additions to its collections. He is also the speaker at our meeting on 12th February, presenting an account of his further research on the

Mumbles Railway, with mention of *The Mumbles Train Remembered*, which he edited for the Museum. For this year's St David's Lecture on 26th February Mr Peter Lord, leading authority on art and culture in Wales, will be drawing on his work for a new book now in preparation to explore aspects of middle class portraiture in Wales and the USA in the nineteenth century. Next day we have our ever-popular St David's Day Coffee Morning, arranged by our Social Committee.

Dr Ernest Jones is known internationally as Sigmund Freud's friend, collaborator and official biographer, and in his own right as a great investigator into the human subconscious. Less widely known is that he was born in Gowerton and retained his links with Swansea and Gower until his death. He will be the subject of Mr Chris Hill's talk on 12th March. The last evening lecture of the season will be on 9th April, when two leading archaeologists from the Swansea-based Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust will describe some recent discoveries in our area, likely to include the David Evans site in Swansea (Swansea Castle defences), and Church Hill near Parkmill (Romans). This Programme ends in traditional manner with an evening of music and a buffet supper arranged by our Social Committee on 14th May.

## **LUNCH TIME TALKS 2009**

### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT - EVOLVING SWANSEA**

Over recent years these lunch time talks have proved to be very popular so book these dates - bring your sandwiches

#### **THURSDAYS AT 1 O'CLOCK**

5<sup>th</sup> March - Rhodri Morgan - First Minister: An Assembly Perspective

19<sup>th</sup> March – Revd Andrew Vessey – Rector of St. Mary's – Parish Church of Swansea

26<sup>th</sup> March – David Williams – Regeneration Officer: City Centre Development

2<sup>nd</sup> April - Iwan Davies – Head of Culture and Tourism

**Sessions finish by 2 o'clock**

## **Social Committee News**

We are delighted to have been joined by two new members whose help has been invaluable on several occasions recently when we have been particularly busy supporting functions at the Museum. We thought we were fully stretched during National Archaeology Day which was such a great success in the summer but the demand for our refreshments at the Book Fair in October was quite phenomenal. We

were certainly glad of our enlarged team who coped so cheerfully and made light work of it all. Thank you to everyone.

As I write we are looking forward to our Christmas Social Evening serving mulled wine and seasonal refreshments after Raymond Walker's lecture on alternatives to Christmas Fare.

Our next major event will be our traditional St. David's Day Coffee Morning on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2009 at 10.30 a.m. Donations of cakes, good quality books and bric-a-brac will be gratefully received.

Christine Morris: R.I.S.W. Social Committee

## **RISW Web-site**

Our web-site is [www.risw.org.uk](http://www.risw.org.uk). This can be consulted for our current programme and other activities. Recently, due to the work of our web-site officer, Peter Hutchison, all the items appearing in our *Swansea History Journal (Minerva)* volumes 1-6 have been listed for reference. If members feel that there are any items that would be useful to have on our web-site, please contact Peter.

Peter Hutchison e-mail address: [petehutch@compuserve.com](mailto:petehutch@compuserve.com)

## **Museum News**

The museum has had an exciting year so far with several major projects being completed. The work on structural timbers and the deck of the museum's Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter 'Olga' has been completed thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the City and County of Swansea.

Community partners in the project were Cyrennians who photographed the progress of the restoration work, Daniel James School who filmed the progress and produced a DVD 'Pimp my Boat' and Pentre Hafod School who produced the new 'Olga' education leaflet.

Museum staff have been busy recording, digitising and updating the art collections and work on paper including individual images from previously unrecorded early photographic albums. Two of these albums travelled to America earlier this year to be displayed in the Impressed by Light - Early British Photographers exhibitions in New York and Washington. They then moved on to the Musée D'Orsay in Paris from where they were couriered back to Swansea in October.

The RISW has supported the museum with several new acquisitions to the collections - for more details please purchase the latest edition of *Swansea History Journal (Minerva)*!

Superb catering has also been provided at several events throughout the last few months and has been greatly appreciated by all present. Members of the RISW have also produced an amazing amount of research and displays for both current and future exhibitions and also assisted with workshops. Museum staff would like to thank everyone for all their hard work and dedication.

Unfortunately the lift still hasn't been installed, the latest information indicates that the work will commence on site towards the end of February and continue into May! This means that future exhibition and event programmes have not been able to be put on the calendar. Hopefully once the contractors have been appointed in January, more detailed information as to how we will be able to access the building during the 'works' will be available.

From January the Collections Centre at Landore will be open every Wednesday, giving the public more opportunities to view at least the larger objects in the reserve collections. Appointments can always be made to view specific objects or collections. Hopefully by 2009 all our collection databases will be available through the museum website. Plans to develop the facilities and collections access at Landore are progressing slowly – plans have now been drawn up which include a mezzanine floor with gantries to enable visitors to look down on the boats, plus a glass extension with a copper chimney!

Gareth Al Tawab: Curator

## **Workshop News**

At the end of October there were "Big Draw" workshops at the museum on the theme of coal mining. This fits in with the current schools theme, and the excellent paintings and drawings are on show in the Education Room. (The museum helped initiate Big Draw sessions in the Brangwyn Hall for the first time too - a wonderful venue for art workshops.)

At the time of writing, Christmas is approaching. On Saturday 6th December we have planned decoration-making (out of willow) with Jo Steadman - this is always very popular. And this year "Miss Phoebe" will also be around on that day, to tell everyone about Christmas Stories and Customs. The museum is open between Christmas and New Year, and in previous years this has been quite a busy spell; this year there will be "Christmassy" painting sessions for families with Mary Hayman, Jonathan Powell and Rhiannon Morgan.

We hope there will be more "things to do" over the February half term, but this is exactly the time when the lift may be installed, so we will have to see how things go. We do, though, intend to put on a full week of art workshops for 11 to 19 year olds at Easter. The RI sponsored this last year, but we have other funding this time, which means we can devote the resources to a wider range of activities. It is marvellous to be able to put on so many events for children and families, and the museum is very grateful to the Royal Institution for its involvement.

Gerald Gabb: Education Officer

## **BAFM Annual Conference**

I represented the RISW at this year's Annual Conference of the British Association of Friends of Museums. Penzance was a superb venue, and Penlee House Museum and Gallery a wonderful host museum. The permanent collection of paintings of Newlyn artists and the special exhibition of their drawings are a joy. The theme was 'A Sense of Place': words which were interpreted in different and fascinating ways during the weekend.

On the Saturday morning we got down to serious matters. Kate Brindley, Director of Bristol Museum Service, spoke of the challenges which face museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Modern museums must be business-like, politically astute, abreast of modern technology, have a high standard of collection care and modern facilities yet be visually beautiful temples of culture. Friends need to understand the changing role of museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and help their museum to survive and thrive in a difficult world. There must be a relationship of trust and respect between the museum and its Friends

Next was a session devoted to discussion groups and feedback. We considered the relationship between museums and their Friends. Many cogent comments resulted, and Alison Bevan, who chaired this session, promised to collate them for the BAFM Journal and if possible the Museums Journal too. This would be an excellent way of conveying Friends' often quite outspoken comments to the museum profession. Sir Neil Cossons gave the keynote speech, making a strong case for museums to be free-standing rather than local authority run. Museums should be publicly funded and run by boards of trustees committed to their true purpose. He advocated that a national body of Friends groups needs powerful authority and a clear voice to support museums when threats arise, as – he said - they will.

BAFM's AGM was expertly conducted by our Chair, Norah Dunbar. Members voted in favour of an increase in subscriptions. Winners of the annual Newsletter Competition were announced.

The conference ended with an enticing presentation about next year's venue at York in October, to be hosted by Friends of York Art Gallery. The theme will be 'Challenge and Change', to build on the discussions of this year's conference. Our hosts excelled themselves by providing a huge choice of visits and excursions. I think we all wanted to go on each one! Suffice it to say that everyone I spoke to had thoroughly enjoyed their visits, which were well organised and expertly led. Finally, all members of the RISW are entitled to attend BAFM events, and I can thoroughly recommend the Annual Conference as a stimulating and enjoyable

Autumn break. If you're interested in going to York next year, let me know and I'll send you information.

Jenny Sabine: BAFM Representative

## **Programme 2008-09**

Not received your programme for 2008-09? Have you over looked your subscription? Payments by Standing Order and under Gift Aid help the RISW greatly. Contact our Membership Secretary, Bernice Candy, via Swansea Museum.

## **Correspondence**

Thank you for the interesting replies to the letter from the Rev. R.L.I> Bevan on 'Chocolate and Cream', and Great Western Train Colours. These replies have now been forwarded to the Rev. Bevan and correspondence on this subject is closed. Correspondence for consideration for inclusion in future newsletters may be sent by e-mail to the Editor.

**Material for inclusion in the Spring 2009 edition of the RISW Newsletter must reach the editor by 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009, preferably by e-mail to; [Marian.funnell@btinternet.com](mailto:Marian.funnell@btinternet.com), or by post to; Mrs M.Funnell, 6 Hael Lane, Southgate, Swansea SA32AP**