



Newsletter

Spring 2009

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The President Writes

I wish to express on your behalf our grateful thanks to Gwyneth our President for the past 7 years. She showed great drive and energy in building on the past and introducing new initiatives for the benefit of the RISW, the Museum and the wider community. We wish her well in her semi retirement!

I am aware that within the Council and the membership there are people with a great wealth of talent, knowledge and expertise and it is my hope and wish that I can enlist your support in developing the work of the RISW. In enriching the RISW and its work I am sure you will also feel enriched.

Since the last Newsletter there have been further excellent lectures and activities and accounts of these are contained within this Newsletter.

It was a complete surprise when I was asked to be your President and I will do my utmost to ensure that the trust put in me is not misplaced.

I look forward to your support, comments and suggestions as to how you feel the RISW should proceed.

Lyndon Morris

Lecture reviews

**Thursday 11th December 2008; FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WHY NOT TRY INVERTEBRATES!
by Mr Raymond Walker, RI Council member**

In his light-hearted but informative pre-Christmas talk, Raymond Walker, a regular contributor to our *Swansea History Journal (Minerva)*, invited us to consider some alternatives to more traditional festive fare. His speciality is natural history, and he began with an anecdote about the popularity amongst some Norwegians for taking a

yearly quota of 'Guga' from one of their coastal islands - Guga being young Gannets. The birds are killed and stored for some months, and when suitably 'high' (i.e. 'high' enough to be thrown away) are then eaten! Though evidently they were not invertebrates, after this anecdote, none of the speaker's further alternatives to Christmas fare seemed at all bizarre. Oysters, of course, figured strongly. Sadly, severe overfishing in the nineteenth century destroyed the local Mumbles oyster beds, and the oysters to be found in Swansea Market now are usually of Portuguese origin, large and with distinctive shells. The Romans' love of oysters is well-known, and this summer's excavation at a newly-discovered site near Parkmill has already produced large quantities of oyster shells - of the local Welsh size. We were given a glimpse of the statue of Molly Malone in Dublin, complete with her 'cockles and mussels' barrow, and reminded that 'alive alive oh!' was the only safe way to eat them (though that did not save poor Molly). Scallops, those succulent shellfish, familiar to all from the logo of the Shell petrol company, were included in Raymond's menu, as well as cuttlefish. Finally we were reminded that Lewis Weston Dillwyn's published account related to the subject of this talk ran to one thousand pages, - but at that point we adjourned to enjoy the fully traditional Christmas refreshments, provided for us to the usual excellent standard by our Social Committee led by Mrs Christine Morris.

Thursday 15 January 2009; THE TWO LEGGED FOX

By Rod Cooper.

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This was the story of two families in 19th century Llanrhidian: the Morgans, relatively well-off with holdings in England as well as in Llanrhidian; and the Batcocks, their less well-off neighbours willing to take advantage of any situation. Nevertheless, they appear to have got on relatively well. Charles Morgan kept a diary from 1837 which came to light when an attic was being cleared. It was written in an incredibly tiny hand and was brought to the attention of our speaker who set out to read it. Much of the story of the *'two-legged' fox*, Chris Batcock, comes from this source. The Batcock family moved into the centre of Llanrhidian and ran the Dolphin Inn and High Mill with the latter becoming the home of Chris Batcock. He was involved in a host of misdemeanours. There was the missing wood provided by the Morgans for the school that they had founded in the village; there was the assault at a toll-gate after a pre-Christmas fayre; there was also the case of the disappearing and re-appearing sheep and the theft and subterfuge over disappearing chickens at Leason. For each of these and other various misdeeds he was brought to court in Swansea. He was a glib talker and smart operator and was able to come up with feasible alibis which got him off on several occasions. However, both Llanrhidian and the Law finally got fed up with him and he was given '7 years with penal servitude'. To serve this he was sent first to Pentonville and then on to Dartmoor. What happened to him after that is a mystery.

(We are most grateful to Mr Cooper, not only for a fascinating lecture, but also for standing in with only a day's notice due to the indisposition of Bernard Morris whose lecture was scheduled for that evening).

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Thursday, 12th February 2009; THE MUMBLES RAILWAY REVISITED.
By Gerald Gabb, Senior Education Officer, Swansea Museum.

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Railway Revisited*

2008 saw celebrations marking the 200th Anniversary of the Mumbles Railway. One of the many associated activities was the collection of reminiscences from local people of the Mumbles Train. These formed the starting point for Gerald's talk and demonstrated just how much the railway was loved by the people of Swansea in its day. In question time after the talk the point was raised as to whether the railway would be still with us if it had managed to carry on for a further 10-15 years. There was some agreement that it might have survived, but in all honesty, it had become badly in need of much investment which was not forthcoming in 1960. The railway as a passenger service used horse-drawn vehicles to begin with. Later in the 19th century, these were replaced by steam locomotives, to be in turn replaced in the 20th century by the well-remembered double-decker trams. The train was composed of two or more of these coupled together. Among the aspects well-remembered included the placement of 'old penny' coins on the rails to flatten them out. The reason for this craze remains something of a mystery, but one explanation may have been that when retrieved they could be used as tokens for slot machines at Mumbles Pier! Many folk recalled that the railway always ran to time and that you could set your watch by it. In spite of the fact that there were no barriers along the line and people crossed the lines at will, there were very few casualties. No doubt this feature would to-day have led to the line's closure by the Health and Safety Executive! The line was used by commuters and shoppers into Swansea and ran a full service throughout the year, but it really came into its own on public holidays when people poured out towards Mumbles and the Gower with connecting bus services from Oystermouth to the Gower beaches. Besides the talk with its fascinating illustrations we were also introduced to a large number of books, periodicals, articles and posters associated with the railway which had been brought together with great diligence for the 200th Anniversary celebrations. This was not the standard RISW evening lecture: this change made it all the more enjoyable.

Thursday 26th February 2009; THE RISW ST DAVID'S LECTURE.
**WELSH FACES - AMERICAN FACES: Portraiture and the middle Class in
Wales and the United States.**

By Mr Peter Lord, art historian and author

As one of the leading historians of art in Wales, noted for his innovative thinking, Peter Lord proved once more to be a most appropriate speaker for this event. He began by pointing out that despite the War of Independence, close ties remained between the two nations. Also that American society had its own strata of the more and less privileged, and that the former shared many of the cultural aspirations of their European counterparts. In both Wales and America a strong middle class emerged, composed of successful professionals, such as physicians, lawyers, merchants, ship-owners and the like. These had wealth and influence within their communities, but were conscious of their lack of traditions such as motivated the old established families. Making skilful use of pairs of digital photographs of some of the many portraits of these middle class people, the speaker showed how they

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employed indigenous artists to create portraits of themselves and their families to echo those of the upper classes. In both content and style these portraits from either side of the Atlantic had many similarities, but more remarkable was the number which survived to form a major sociological resource and record of the middle class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although many of the artists in Wales who created these portraits are now referred to for convenience as 'artisans', the speaker showed how sophisticated many of them could be, adapting their style from 'naive' to 'high art' according to the wishes, and finances, of their patrons. In contrast, their more isolated equivalents in America continued in their own homely styles, regarding these as superior in themselves to those of the European art scene. By the twentieth century this approach had led to American painting in the folk tradition being promoted as part of national, and nationalist, culture. By contrast in Wales, and Europe, such art works have been less regarded, being considered too urban for the 'rural life' museums, but not 'high' enough for the fine art establishments. Happily, the speaker is currently working on a book which will deal thoroughly with the themes set out in his lecture.

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Social Committee News

St. David's Day Coffee Morning

The Lecture Room looked bright and cheerful with its red table cloths and daffodil table centres for the St. David's Day Coffee Morning. We had a good number of people enjoying the sociable atmosphere and amongst them quite a number of new faces.

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We were delighted by the excellent harp recital given by 15 year old Ffion Davies from Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr and it is heartening to know that we have such talented young people willing to share their expertise with us.

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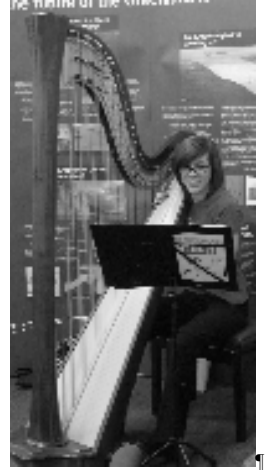
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In addition to enjoying the morning we are glad to know that 8 new members have enrolled and we have contributed nearly £300 to the funds. We are grateful to all the Social Committee for all their preparations and contributions to the event and thank the Museum staff for their help and cooperation.

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Spring into Summer – Social Evening – Thursday 14th May at 7.00 p.m.

We are looking forward to the above event which will be a music recital followed by the usual excellent buffet including a glass of wine. Tickets priced £7 are available from me or from any member of the Social Committee or from the Reception desk at the Museum from April onwards. It helps catering if tickets are purchased in advance but of course they will be available on the evening. We look forward to seeing you then.

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

ANNUAL SUMMER OUTING – THURSDAY 4TH JUNE 2009

VISIT TO THE NATIONAL WOOL MUSEUM, nr NEWCASTLE EMLYN

Depart from Swansea Museum 9 o'clock to arrive at Welsh Wool Museum in time for a short break prior to a Conducted Tour commencing at 11.30

From 12.30 to 2.00 p.m. will be a break for lunch,
looking around the shop and relaxing.

The coach will then begin to make its way back to Swansea stopping at the Carmarthenshire County Museum for about an hour.

The coach should arrive back at Swansea Museum about 5 p.m.

The cost for travel will be £12 per person

**Please let Eirwen Davies know as soon as possible
if you intend to make the visit. Tel. Swansea 403146.**

Cheques made payable to RISW

Light refreshments, soup, rolls with fillings, Pannini, cakes and drinks, available at Wool Museum

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Membership Standing Order Mandate

Enclosed with the Newsletter is a revised Standing Order Mandate. All members will be allocated a membership reference no. which will simplify the recording of members, especially those who pay by standing order when there are so many common surnames – e.g. Davies, Jones, Morris, Williams.

To ensure an accurate membership record for the year commencing 1st June would you please return the enclosed form a.s.a.p. by end of April to David Jenkins, Treasurer, 134 Pennard Drive, Southgate, Swansea, SA3 2DP

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Just a reminder that the 2009/10 issue of our Journal is in preparation. I welcome articles and shorter pieces from RISW members and their friends and acquaintances.

If you are doing research or have information about topics of local interest I will be delighted to hear from you. All items offered will be considered by our Publications Group.

The deadline for submission of articles is 31 May 2009. Please let me know as soon as possible if you have an idea or are working on something, so that we can discuss the topic and length, etc. well in advance. You can contact me by phone: 01792 874 143, or by email: jennifer@sabine5.wanadoo.co.uk

Jenny Sabine

Museum News

The Curator Reports

Swansea Museum – the last few months!

Delays to the lift installation have meant [postponements to](#) our temporary exhibition programme but in the meanwhile exhibitions relating to the Norwegian Church communities in Wales, the Greenland ice sheet and a Patchwork art exhibition by young asylum seekers have filled the gap!

The tenders have now gone out for the lift contract so hopefully a schedule of works will be available towards the end of April.

Work is going ahead with the ‘Sail Swansea’ exhibition; a big thank you to Mr Austin for all his research and assistance!

A grant of £ 2,500 has been received from the Royal Society towards the anniversary exhibition and activities planned for later this year.

Emma Williams, Collections and Access officer, will be returning from maternity leave in April. Gareth Workman has been doing sterling work covering her absence.

Following interviews this week (short listing from 329 candidates) a new Assistant Maritime Technician has been appointed; [Matthew Senior](#), an RYA Ocean Yacht master and very experienced Skipper with 8 Atlantic crossings under his belt. This will mean that ‘Olga’ the Bristol Channel Pilot Cutter will be able to sail more regularly and once work below deck is completed will be able to venture further afield! [Volunteers](#) are still working on the boats, industrial collections, researching for future exhibitions and helping add valuable information to the documentation of the geology, natural history and ethnography collections. If any members are interested in becoming Volunteers please contact Phil Treseder, Community Access Officer.

Many thanks to the RISW for their support in enabling the museum to acquire a rare Swansea pottery pearl ware cabaret set from Bonhams auction in December and to

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David Jenkins, Treasurer, 134 Pennard Drive, Southgate, Swansea, SA3 2DP¶

¶ Late News: . Gerald Gabb has decided to retire in August. His work with the RISW and the Museum has been immense – more in the next News Letter - Lyndon¶

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Helen Hallesy and Bernard Morris for their research and advice. Grants were also obtained from the MLA/V&A grant purchase fund and the Art Fund to enable the purchase to go ahead.

The cabaret set is now at the museum awaiting conservation and once, the work is complete will go on display.

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Recently the museum was contacted by Cwmbwrla School who wished to return a collection of the museums objects which were placed at the school for safekeeping prior to the Second World War. The objects, mainly ethnography have now returned to the collection with a mysterious addition - a Wedgewood 'Ferdinand the Bull'!

Grants have also been given by CyMAL to enable the museum to purchase two new cases for the display of costume and to enable objects to be exhibited, in other venues and to help develop the future of the education service in line with the new national curriculum and the inspiring 'Learning for All' framework.

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Staff at the museum would once again like to thank the RISW for all their support and advice

Garethe El-Tawab

Museum activities for children, families and adults over the last year

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Over the school Easter holiday, we begin our "Heritage Huts" project. There are two huts, built by Paul Giuffrida, deputy Exhibitions Officer at the Museum, and they resemble Langland beach huts. They will be painted by the three artists involved, Jonathan Powell, Rhiannon Morgan and Mary Hayman, and then there will be workshops to decorate them with scenes and figures to do with Swansea & the Seaside in the Past. Come and have a go!

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ADULTS ONLY day on Thursday 16th April 10-4.00 with Mary – *please ring the Museum 01792/653763 or email gerald.gabb@swansea.gov.uk to book*

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GIRLS, BOYS & FAMILIES on Friday 17th April and Sunday 19th April, 10-4.00 with Rhiannon and John – *please just drop in & try it, parents and grandparents are welcome to get covered in paint too !*

The finished huts will be on display in the Central Library in July, and we hope to find more venues.

Our new president, Lyndon Morris, has been very active in the R.I.'s bid, in partnership with the Museum and two council agencies called Education Effectiveness and Out of School Learning, to secure Arts Council funding to run MAST workshops (which stands for 'Making Art in the Summer Time'. It involves two professional artists and 20 participants in the 11-19 brackets, and also involves a lot of paperwork, but is very worthwhile!

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Gerald Gabb

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The End of an Era
Gwyneth Davies with RISW Council Members



Late News from RISW: Gerald Gabb has decided to retire in August. His work with the RISW and the Museum has been immense – more in the next News Letter – Lyndon Morris.

Material for inclusion in the Autumn Edition of the RISW Newsletter must reach the editor by Friday July 17th, preferably via e-mail to; marian.funnell@btinternet.com, or by post to; Mrs M.Funnell. 6, Hael Lane , Southgate, Swansea, SA3 2AP

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