

"A VERNACULAR CUPBOARD FROM VIRGINIA" NEWSLETTER NO. 14 (1991)

Dear Sir

I was most interested in Jonathan Prown's report (Newsletter No. 14, page 10) on the primitive timber cupboard discovered in Virginia which may have furnished a slave cabin. I wish to draw an analogy which will, I trust, prove helpful. Before early morning workers' trains operated, the men employed in remote Welsh slate quarries lived during the week in 'barracks' and only went home at weekends. In these treeless mountainous areas living conditions proved rugged because the men were required to construct their own makeshift bunks and 'bait' or 'snap' cupboards in which the week's provisions supplied by their wives were kept.

These lockers were frequently built from slabs of slate (the most readily available material), the fixed members being united by 'tusk' tenons and the doors featuring integral pin hinges, comparable to those found on the Amherst cupboard. Some 15 years ago, I myself saw one of these relics from a world we have lost in a ruin at Dinorwic quarry.

It is well known that many Welsh highlanders emigrated to the Appalachian Mountains in Western Virginia, and some of the farmers there still in fact count their sheep in Welsh. This would, I suggest, explain how a tradition of stone age technology was transmitted from West Wales to the USA.

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