

Billed as probably the last of the Country House sales we are likely to see in Wales, the dispersal of the remaining contents of Derwydd in the Towy Valley, Carmarthenshire in September had surprisingly little of interest to furniture enthusiasts.

On view, but not for sale, was the elaborately carved bedstead made c1500 for Sir Rhys ap Thomas, whose carved emblems are to be seen on an exterior doorway at the house. Although this important Welsh artefact has always been understood to have been promised to the National Collection, it is apparently currently stored in Sotheby's warehouse.

The cupboard illustrated (fig. 4) was in the Sale however, although the auctioneers were clearly unsure what to make of it. But with so few pieces on offer it was featured as the principal furniture lot, with a nervous estimate of £2000-4000 (plus premium). The piece has long been of interest to antiquarians in the county, and known as the 'Hoda Cum Tewdwr Cabinet', was regarded at the end of the last century as being of c1416, and the earliest example of Welsh carving known. The associations which have surrounded it for the last hundred years were alone sufficient to attract the attention of the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagans, who acquired the cupboard for £10,000 (including premium).

The chief interest centres on the finely carved doors which were thought by the auctioneers to be part of a larger scheme of panelling, and to have possibly been

researched in the last century. They had, however, clearly always been cupboard doors, and the carving is completely original. The coats of arms represent the illustrious descent claimed by George Owen (1552-1613), an important Elizabethan antiquary, and Lord Marcher of Cemaes (Pembrokeshire). The decoration and panel construction are identical to a small number of other examples known from this 'remote' area, and date these doors to c1600.

The National Museum was eager to acquire the piece even on the basis of it being a nineteenth century construction using locally-made heraldic panels of this earlier period. But an unexpected bonus was the discovery by staff at Country Antiques (Wales), who collected the cupboard, of the pencilled inscription of a local cabinet-maker, John Davies of Llanstephan, a village at the mouth of the Towy estuary. The carcass of the cupboard is very skilfully made using local estate oak, and there was no attempt to imitate early construction, or to stain and blend the new and old work. In this it differs from most of the 'antiquarian' furniture found in such houses, including a number of other pieces in this Sale, as well as chimney pieces still in situ. The cupboard will be on view at St Fagan's Castle, as part of the presentation of the furnishings of a nineteenth century Welsh gentry household; and it is hoped that research being undertaken will eventually illuminate both the seventeenth and nineteenth century contexts in which it was made and used.

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Fig. 4
Hoda Cum Tewdwr Cabinet