

The Study Day began with a talk by Richard Bebb on what represents 'Welshness' in early oak furniture. The first example shown of such furniture was a sixteenth century court cupboard. First alerted to this by a dealer-colleague, this piece seemed to have travelled over much of England before Richard finally caught up with it! It was profusely carved with many zoomorphic forms including the heraldic devices of a greyhound and a lion rampant. After careful research it had been concluded that this cupboard was made as a gift to celebrate a marriage between the Bowen and Scourfield families of South Wales in 1578.

Another remarkable example of furniture from this period is the Wynn Cupboard made in the Conwy Valley for John Wyn ap Maredudd about 1530; again profusely carved with heraldic devices. We were reminded that heraldry was important in the sixteenth and seventeenth century; many Welsh landowners used heraldry as a means of enhancing their status. Welsh heraldry had its own rules, and bards were employed to provide evidence of royal descent. Carving on these 16th century pieces is of the highest quality, often using animal forms.

Although we now admire early oak furniture for its colour and patination, many of these early pieces would have been painted, particularly the heraldic devices.

Richard's talk continued with a description of other items of furniture and fixed woodwork from all parts of Wales and we were left in no doubt about the abilities of the local craftsmen who were able to produce such outstanding work. At the end of the talk we were able to carry out a 'hands-on' inspection of some of the pieces that had been shown to us. P.C.

To complement a most enjoyable day we were treated to an illuminating and instructive paper on the construction of chests by Luke Millar. Titled '*Chest construction - a guide for regional studies*', we benefited from a concise and clear systematic development of a new and successful chest nomenclature illustrated by clear and pertinent slides and diagrams. This system of analysis and cataloguing should be used by all serious researchers and writers in this field. I am sure that there is more to add, but as a clear and logical study this is an excellent starting point.

The talk followed the lecture notes beginning with the objectives and method, and followed by the analysis and nomenclature.

The illustrations were all clear and gave a good overview of Welsh chests from the 16th to 19th centuries. Copies of these notes were available on the day and are a fine supplement to an excellent lecture. S.F.

Richard Bebb opened the afternoon programme by giving an absorbing and thought-provoking talk on 'The Development of Welsh Furniture' concentrating on how it has changed over time and what light this might throw on furniture history in general. He recounted the widely held viewpoint of furniture historians that the general movement

of stylistic influence was in a socially downward direction - a viewpoint to which he could not wholly subscribe. Richard went on to support his argument by illustrating and discussing a number of distinctive items of Welsh furniture in their historical and social context, starting with the Judges chair from a 12th century manuscript of the Welsh Laws and progressing through comb-back chairs, spinning wheels, boarded chairs, dressers including dairy and glazed versions, lipwork chairs, hanging presses, tables, food cupboards, coffor bachs, Carmarthenshire coffers, chests of drawers known as half-chests or half-drawers, cwpwrdd deuddarns and tridarns, bureau bookcases, a distinctive clock case by Samuel Roberts, a preachers chair said to have been used by Howell Harris the Welsh Methodist leader, inlaid coffers and early church woodwork.

Everyone agreed at the end of Richard's absorbing talk that his argument had been both persuasive and stimulating with a carefully considered examination of the variety of Welsh furniture in its historical and social context.

Lynne Bebb's talk on Welsh ceramics was equally absorbing. She said that ceramics had played an important part in Welsh social life and pottery was central to certain customs such as the use of wassail bowls in Glamorgan at New Year and both bowls and puzzle jugs used in Carmarthenshire at All Hallows' Eve celebrations. Lynne said that the collection and display of decorative ceramics identified status, wealth, identity and virtue in Welsh family life. This was exemplified by the personalised dedications, names and dates commemorating important family occasions found inscribed on all manner of wares. Welsh women used their disposable income such as 'egg money' to purchase pottery for use and display. In North Wales the dresser would have been dressed with a blue and white dinner service with mugs, jugs and ornaments displayed in a glass cupboard or hung from shelves and beams. In South Wales the dresser normally had an open base for pots and crocks and the top held a more colourful display, including hand-painted and sponge decorated plates, jugs and bowls. The tea service and ornaments of various kinds were usually contained in a glazed cupboard. Throughout Lynn's talk she cleverly illustrated her points by referring to actual pieces and ceramic displays on dressers in the Mill from both North and South Wales.

Our examination of Welsh furniture which followed, encompassed all three floors of the Mill and covered the period from the seventeenth through to the twentieth century. A particularly unique example of a potboard dresser from Harlech with drop pendants and cut fretwork to the cornice and turned columns to the base was admired.

Traditions of chequer banding and flowing line petal inlay were also executed on coffers, coffor bachs and bureau bookcases from Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and the South Wales Valleys. The construction design of a marriage linen press from Cardiganshire was also debated. All in all this was a unique 'hands-on' experience covering furniture from every part of Wales that was not to be missed. Our very sincere thanks go to Richard, Lynne, Leila, Tim, Allison and Luke Millar for an exceptional day. If another 'Welsh Furniture Study Day' is programmed for the Autumn I commend it to you all. D.H.