

Castle Mill, Kidwelly

Sunday 20 May

We gathered again in the attractive surroundings of the Castle Mill at Kidwelly, the Bebb family emporium, with three floors of 17th to 19th century Welsh furniture and associated objects. Here was indeed a feast of pieces to be examined including, at a rough count, no fewer than 28 dressers. Divided into two groups, we were escorted round some of the highlights. These included the richly carved Gwydir Castle cupboard, long dismissed as a 19th century reconstruction, but now resplendent with Richard's seal of approval, and the 1666 Wynn wainscot chair, so sharp and fresh in appearance, but authenticated by close comparisons and its presence in a 19th century painting.

There was also perhaps the earliest known Welsh dresser, dating from the first half of the 17th century, with unusual vertical ventilation slats of uncertain purpose in its cupboard base; a 1711 south Pembrokeshire oak coffer, unusually decorated with carving as well as inlay and the use of black stain, and a Carmarthen mahogany telescopic dining table bearing a brass plaque of David Morley, c.1815.

Richard had managed to conjure up some copies of his book, to be perused but not taken before the official launch in June. The tempting, weighty tomes, which finally fill such a long-standing gap in regional furniture studies, were well received and numerous orders were left. We were most fortunate to be able to see in the flesh (or wood) a number of the pieces included and to receive such a helpful personal introduction, not only to early oak, but all the way through to the 19th century.

We are deeply indebted to Richard and Lynne Bebb, Luke Millar, Allison Hurren, Serretta and Leila Bebb for all the work they put into making such a memorable weekend.

Christopher Claxton Stevens