

Welsh Houses Study Day

22 October

A 'Grand Day Out' in the Vale of Glamorgan was promised by joint organisers Andrew Jenkins and Philip Havard, and this they most certainly delivered; we were joined by members of the Furniture History Society. Appropriately, in welcoming us to the *Distinctively Welsh* exhibition at Philip and Christine's Cowbridge antiques shop, Philip addressed us standing on a rare Welsh preaching chair. The highlight of the exhibition was undoubtedly the group of four late 18th century Gower chests. These, similar in size to the more familiar *coffor bach*, feature distinctive low-relief carving of tulips, roses and birds. Such chests are seemingly unrecorded elsewhere, and to see four together is a rare treat. A long-case clock from Llangadog, Carmarthenshire, with original painted decoration simulating ebony and mahogany inlay, and a very small teak settle of rich colour, were among the varied selection of chairs, tables and spoon racks displayed.

Our first stop in the Vale was at Penmark Church. The main attraction here was an unusually small 'refectory'

table which was in fact the former altar of the church, initialled, and dated 1709. Six-legged and only 55in. long, it was of massive construction, apparently all in yew-wood, and with leg turnings very close in style to the church's altar rails. In the sanctuary were a coffer and two wainscot chairs, one carved and with a top rail and apron of typically Welsh shaping; it is also stamped with concentric circles somewhat similar to those on chairs we saw in the June visit to County Durham.

From Penmark Church we progressed to a farmhouse where we were privileged to see a number of the pieces from Gelly Farm, Glynccarrwg, so thoroughly described and illustrated in Richard Bebb's *Welsh Furniture*. It is seldom that one can see at first hand, and handle, such a gamut of well-provenanced furniture, from the massive oak panelled settle down to a lidded butter container (both with stamped initials).

Next came our third port of call, and lunch, the latter a sumptuous spread, in a magnificent 'Great House' - mainly Georgian, built around an earlier core. Everything here was of fine quality, perhaps the highlight being a mahogany sideboard by David Morley of Carmarthen, although to our especial liking was the selection of Welsh oak furniture, and an amazing display of samplers.

Our final visit was to a *Plas* of late 20th century construction, but cleverly incorporating many reclaimed features from a variety of earlier structures, and furnished with pieces and paintings from many periods. An elegant refectory table of wonderful colour and patination stood out. The surrounding, dramatically stepped, garden focused on a small lake and other water features. Our final hosts sent us on our way with a delightful tea.

The meticulous planning of the organisers and the generosity of our hosts gave us all a most varied, informative, and enjoyable day.

Neil and Glynda Speed