

Cymdeithas Brycheiniog a Chyfeillion yr Amgueddfa
Brecknock Society and Museum Friends
(Charity Number 518041)

Newsletter August 2015

From the Chairman, John Gibbs (01874 730747 or gibbs@keme.co.uk)

Brecknock Museum / Art Gallery and Brecon Library Project - 'Brecon Cultural Hub'

The National Park Authority granted full planning permission and listed building consent for the new Brecon Cultural Hub in late April 2015, following unanimous approval by its planning committee. Powys County Council had progressed the detail design and appointed contractor Kier Ltd with a view to starting work on site this summer. However the project team has found it needs to make a number of changes to the approved design drawings for reasons of (a) construction efficiency and (b) keeping within the strict budget. This regrettably requires a further, albeit straightforward, application and planning committee hearing in early October 2015.

Obviously the Brecknock Society is concerned about this slippage and the effects of inflation on project cost. We needed reassurance that officers of Powys CC and The National Park were working together as effectively as possible to deal with the planning paperwork. I have recently spoken to Paul Griffiths (Strategic Director, PCC) and John Cook, Chief Executive of the National Park, and both have assured me that the staff of the two organisations are cooperating closely. As John Cook put it 'we are all working in the spirit of making things happen'.

From the Brecknock Society's perspective as a co-funding partner, one of our key links into the project is via our Council Member Dr Mervyn Bramley who has assisted Powys CC in the planning and attended the regular progress meetings of its project team. These progress meetings have not been held this year and I was pleased to get Paul Griffiths' assurance that a high priority will be set on convening of an early progress meeting of the project team. It is our firm view that effective engagement with the partner organisations (BS &MF and the Brecknock Art Trust) helps the Powys CC team with communication and also with managing key issues such as those mentioned above.

Medieval Breconshire and the Welsh Poets .

This meeting in the middle of May went very well and we have had a number of expressions of appreciation, most notably from our co-sponsor 'The Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (CAWCS)'. We may well be able to arrange other events with the Centre in future. The opening session in the Cathedral featured an excellent talk by Prof Madeleine Gray and the guided walk from the Cathedral to Christ College was much appreciated. The Neuadd at Christ College proved an ideal venue for the more formal part of the programme and, thanks to the College archivist Felicity Kilpatrick, the Chapel was open for viewing over lunchtime. For those who were unable to attend, perhaps I could remind you that a version of the paper '*The fifteenth Century poet Hywel Dafi and his connection with Breconshire*' by Dr Cynfael Lake of Swansea University appears in the most recent issue of Brycheiniog (Vol XLVI)

Forthcoming Meetings

Friday September 4th 'Breconshire Treasures'. St Mary's Church, Brecon. Doors open at 6.00 pm. The Society is hosting this, the opening event of this year's Brecknock History Week (see leaflet enclosed with this letter). As well as displays from many Local History Societies in the county, there will be short talks about particular treasures, including several about items from the collections of the Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery. Refreshments will be available.

ADDITIONAL EVENT Friday October 2nd An evening with the 2015 Roland Mathias Prize-winner Tiffany Atkinson. 7.00 pm at The Muse (The Old Museum) in Glamorgan Street. Tiffany won the prize (which is the Literature Wales prize for poetry in English) with '*So Many Moving Parts*'. You are reminded that it is part of the agreement with Literature Wales, that the winner of the prize should come to Brecon and give us the opportunity of hearing her poetry. Tickets will be available at the door – £3.00 for members of the BS&MF and the Welsh Academy, £4.00 for others; these tickets to include light refreshments. Do come and provide support.

Wednesday October 14th (not Saturday Oct 10th as previously announced). 2.30pm '*Talk and walk*' led by William Gibbs on the life and work of John Evan Thomas, the Brecon-born sculptor who created many memorials in the Brecon area. The talk will take place in the Brecon Cathedral Centre (look out for directions signs on arrival) and will be followed by a guided tour of Thomas's sculptures in the Cathedral and town; finishing at Watton Mount. This will be a joint meeting with the Powys Art Fund

Tuesday November 17th '*The Brinore Tramroad – Historic background and recent research*' 5.00 pm. Brecon Guildhall. When The Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal was built under an Act of Parliament of 1793, the Act allowed the canal company to build feeder railways up to 8 miles in length to transport freight to the canal for transshipment. The Bryn Oer Tramway was built under this act in 1814, opening in 1815. It was a horse-worked plateway that served the Bryn Oer collieries and the limestone quarries at Trefil, dropping to the canal at Talybont-on-Usk. John Jones who has an unrivalled knowledge of the tramroad will give us an account of its history and Tom Davies will tell us of recent research he has conducted on documents relating to its operation. I propose that after the meeting those interested should join for a meal afterwards at a local restaurant.

'Above Brecknock'

I am sure that very many of you will recall the evening in March 2014, when Dr Toby Driver, delivering the 17th Sir John Lloyd lecture, gave a packed house at Theatre Brycheiniog, a wonderful account of the historic County of Breconshire as seen from the air. On that occasion Dr Driver mentioned a forthcoming publication covering the same subject and I am delighted to be able to announce that the book will be out this autumn under the title 'Above Brecknock'. It will be published jointly by the BS&MF and the Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust in collaboration with The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales, Toby Driver's employer.

The book will be launched at an open event in the Studio of Theatr Brycheiniog at 7.15 pm on Friday 20 November 2015. The launch will include refreshments and an illustrated talk about the creation of 'Above Brecknock'. The retail price of the book will be £15 but there will be a pre-publication offer of £13 which will end on the evening of the launch. In addition for members of the Society there will be an offer of only £12 for copies ordered and paid for by September 21st. An offer form is included with this newsletter.

Vernacular Buildings of Breconshire: Tree ring dating project

In preparation for next year's Sir John Lloyd lecture, which will be given by the noted authority Dr Richard Suggett, the BS&MF is collaborating with staff of the Royal Commission to secure more information on the age of some of our old houses by using the 'tree ring dating method'. This involves the analysis of tree growth-ring sequences in narrow cores taken from oak timbers in the building. Oak lays down annual growth rings of varying width (depending on the growing conditions) which are rather like a unique fingerprint. If a datable tree-ring sequence extends as far as the bark edge, then a precise felling date can be obtained. We know that buildings tended to be built from 'green' (unseasoned) timber and felling dates are therefore an accurate guide to building dates.

Dr Suggett has prepared a draft list of houses for which he would like this information and members of the Society will be using their local knowledge to contact householders over the next month or so to determine whether or not they would like to take part. The list is not closed, however, and if you know of a building (including your own) that you think might be included, please contact me for more information. The number of buildings that can be examined is limited, at least partly, by the cost of the project and contributions from householders will enable us to do more work than would otherwise be the case.

Purchase of Colt Hoare watercolour

I am very pleased to say that Sir Richard Colt Hoare's '*A North West View of Brecknock in South Wales, Church of St Mary's 1st of June 1793*' mentioned in the last Newsletter has been acquired for the Museum & Art Gallery. The Brecknock Art Trust is grateful for the support of members of the society who contributed £400 towards the price of £2250. The picture is at present being conserved, remounted and reframed and will be on view at the Sept 4th Meeting 'Breconshire Treasures' in St Mary's (the tower of which is the focal point of the painting).

Keeping in contact

Do please join our email list if you have not done so (not only can it be a helpful reminder of a particular event but it allows us to inform you of new developments and enforced changes of plan). Please contact our Membership Secretary Elizabeth Siberry (elizabeth.siberry@gmail.com). If you think that you are on the list but have not received a mailing recently, please let Elizabeth know.



John Gibbs

Website: <http://www.brecknocksociety.co.uk/society.htm>