

For BS&MF members only

**Cymdeithas Brycheiniog a Chyfeillion yr Amgueddfa**  
**Brecknock Society and Museum Friends**

**(Charity Number 518041)**

**Newsletter November 2015**

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

Dear Friends,

This letter is to invite you to an Extraordinary General Meeting on December 8<sup>th</sup> and to explain the reasons why this meeting is needed. I am also taking the opportunity of apologising for the fact that our talk on November 17<sup>th</sup> has had to be postponed and to bring you up to date with several other ventures.

**Recent developments with the Brecknock Museum / Art Gallery and Brecon Library Project - 'Brecon Cultural Hub'**

In the August Newsletter I reported that the Powys County Council project team was preparing to go back to the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in early October with an application for revisions to the previously-approved design drawings for reasons of (a) construction efficiency and (b) keeping within budget. This application was approved. However, I must inform you that there are still concerns about the project costs and the available budget.

In mid-September, the Society, and the Brecknock Art Trust (BAT) which is also a co-funder of the project, learnt that, even with the revisions to the design, the current estimated project cost would still be over budget - due partly to the higher than expected increase (20%) in UK construction costs since the overall budget was agreed with Powys CC cabinet. Powys CC made it clear that until this matter was resolved, no work could begin on site – not even on the demolition of the long-disused New County Hall.

Our response, together with BAT, has been to insist that there must now be a concerted effort, involving all the funders (Heritage Lottery Fund, BS&MF and BAT with Powys CC), in seeking to close the apparent funding gap. This involves parallel actions of (a) the Powys CC Project Team improving the accuracy of the cost estimate by market testing those parts of the work where costs are less certain (e.g. the mechanical and electrical services), (b) Powys CC negotiating the main work packages with main contractor Kier Ltd, (c) all the funders reviewing their contributions in the light of the higher than expected increase in UK construction costs, and (d) looking for early additional funding commitments. Any further delays to a start will be progressively more difficult to accommodate and could jeopardise the entire project, particularly with the time limit (mid 2017) on the availability of HLF funding.

**The current BS&MF financial commitment.** The Society holds £195,000 in various bank accounts to assist with the development of the Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery, this money coming from the sale in 2008 of the Old Museum (now known as 'the Muse') in Glamorgan Street. As part of the 2010 bid to the HLF for the redevelopment of the Museum & Art Gallery, the Society committed itself to providing £100,000 for the project.

We stated at that time that the balance of funds from the sale of the Old Museum (i.e £95,000) would be for “specific projects in the museum as and when agreed between BS&MF and PCC”. The 2010 bid failed but, with the encouragement of the HLF (and indeed the Welsh Assembly), was followed by the second bid, which involved the co-location of the Museum & Art Gallery and Brecon library. This bid, to which our £100,000 was again committed, was successful.

**An Extraordinary General Meeting on December 8<sup>th</sup>**· The main purpose of this letter is, on behalf of the Executive Council, to invite you to an EGM at the Muse at 4.00 pm on Tuesday December 8<sup>th</sup>. Tea will be available from 3.45 pm. It will provide the Executive Council with the opportunity of bringing the membership up to date with the latest developments on the Brecon Cultural Hub and, as may be appropriate, to seek views on the best way to use our funds at this critical juncture. In this way, the Executive Council will be able to be clear about the availability of the Society’s funds as the funders seek to close the funding gap. It may be helpful if I mention that Nigel Blackmore, Senior Curator at the Museum is currently looking into the costing of elements in the overall project which might be attractive to the Society for the use of its funds. At the last AGM we expressed an interest in supporting the Victorian classroom and adjacent educational space.

#### **Postponed Meeting:**

**Tuesday November 17<sup>th</sup> 'The Brinore Tramroad – Historic background and recent research'** 5.00 pm. Brecon Guildhall.

Due the illness of Mr John Jones who was to have given the background account of the Tramroad, this meeting has had to be postponed.

#### **Launch of 'Above Brecknock': Friday November 20<sup>th</sup>.**

As announced earlier, this book of aerial views of the Breconshire, a joint publication between the Society and The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, 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 by the authors, Dr Toby Driver and Dr Chris Musson, about the creation of the book. The launch will provide the last opportunity to buy the book at the pre-publication price of £13. Thereafter the price of £15 will apply.

#### **Vernacular Buildings of Breconshire: Tree ring dating project**

The last Newsletter gave some information on the tree-ring dating project which we have developed in conjunction with Dr Richard Suggett of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW), in relation to the Sir John Lloyd Memorial Lecture ‘The Vernacular Buildings of Breconshire’ which he will deliver on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2016 at Theatr Brycheiniog .

During the summer, Dr Suggett prepared a draft list of houses for which he would like tree-ring information and on October 14 and 15, he, together with Dr Dan Miles of the Oxford Dendrochronological Unit, visited 17 Breconshire buildings in the company of one or other members of the Executive Council. This was in the nature of a survey to determine the suitability of the buildings for sampling and no actual samples were taken on this occasion. The need for a survey comes from the fact that many buildings of great historic

interest have no oak suitable for sampling. We discovered that, for tree-ring dating, one needs oak timbers that show some evidence of bark or 'waney edge' (a rounded surface where the bark has been removed or fallen away) and which have grown so slowly that there are a large number of growth rings in the sample-core. It takes an expert like Dan Miles to determine suitability – especially where the growth rings are obscured by layers of paint.

Dr Miles took detailed notes and, from discussions with him during the tour, it seems that about half the buildings we visited do have suitable timbers for sampling. We are in the process of considering quotations and sampling schedules with RCAHMW. We are also building up a further list of candidate houses. If you would like to know more, please contact me.

It is worth reporting that Richard Suggett's enthusiasm for his subject is enormous and he was delighted with the buildings he saw – many of which he had only known from the 50-year-old descriptions of Stanley Jones and J.T. Smith in the Society's journal *Brycheiniog*.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Gibbs', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

John Gibbs

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