

Cymdeithas Brycheiniog a Chyfeillion yr Amgueddfa
Brecknock Society and Museum Friends
(Charity Number 518041)
Newsletter January 2019

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

'y Gaer' Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery and Brecon Library

Progress update Although the building now presents a most attractive and inviting appearance, Kier Construction has not finished rectifying various defects and Powys County Council has not been prepared to accept the handover of the site. Once this handover has taken place, Kier will still have a short-list of agreed items (e.g. the missing sandstone cladding) to complete but these will not prevent council staff from moving in and other work taking place. Indeed, the contract with Elmwood for the 'fit-out' of the museum and art galleries, other than the Courtroom, is already largely complete. The major task for the Museum & Art Gallery will be to move the collections from Watton Mount to y Gaer and install them as exhibits in the galleries or place them in the storage areas. This will necessarily take some time and means that the soft opening of y Gaer is not expected to take place until well into April.

The groundwork and landscaping contract on Captain's Walk has started. Planting by the Rich Brothers will follow in March / April.

The Conservation, Display and Interpretation Project As members of the Society know, we together with the Brecknock Art Trust (BAT) are the local funding partners for that element of the y Gaer project that involves the renovation of the Museum & Art Gallery. In addition to making a significant financial contribution to the overall project, we, again together with BAT, have been raising funds under two main headings: (a) for the Conservation & Display of certain artefacts and art works, and (b) for the electronic interpretation of the Collections. In late November 2018, we closed our appeal having met our financial target of £114,300.

The 'Conservation & Display' part of the project has proceeded well with conservation now complete. Work on some of the items – such as the Victorian Pillar Box – arousing considerable local interest. The conserved items and the new display cabinets are now either in y Gaer or Watton Mount awaiting final installation (for more information see www.brecknocksociety.co.uk/cd-project.html). It is also very exciting to be able to report on the progress that is being made with the 'Interpretation' initiative. This is aimed at providing insights into the displays in the Museum and Art Gallery through the use of 45 computer terminals with touchscreens distributed through the galleries. The £50,000 cash grant from the Garfield Weston Foundation for computer hardware and software is complemented by a major commitment of time from over 30 volunteers, recruited by the Society and BAT, to conduct research and interpretation on the exhibits that will be on display. To learn how this was going, some 40 members of the Society attended an enjoyable meeting at the Muse at the end of November on the theme 'The Interpretation of the Brecknock Museum's Collections: how the stories are being told'.

The Port Talbot firm Blackbox-av is designing and producing the computer terminals and associated software. They are established specialists in audio visual interpretation for museums and we are confident that the equipment will be robust and effective. This development has involved close cooperation with Powys CC and ourselves over the way in which the information will be presented. It is evident that the whole operation is, in many ways, a 'trail-blazing' venture! The first tranche of information on 100 artefacts and 50 artworks will be available on the terminals by the time y Gaer opens. More 'in depth' information on these and further exhibits will be added over time.

We see the Interpretation Project as a continuing way in which members of the Society can engage with the work of the Museum & Art Gallery, and thus we will be keen to recruit more volunteer researchers: much of the work can be done from home and we will train any volunteers. More information can be found on our website <http://www.brecknocksociety.co.uk/interpretation-project.html>, or please get in touch with Mervyn Bramley (mervyn.bramley@icloud.com or 01874 665267).

Although the Conservation, Display and Interpretation Appeal has closed, fund raising for the Museum & Art Gallery will remain a major objective of our Society and we already have a number of new initiatives in place – some owing their origin to imaginative and generous ideas advanced by our members. Please contact me if you would like to know more.

Y Gaer Volunteers We are also working with Powys CC over the recruitment of y Gaer Volunteers who will, among other things, greet visitors and help them to make the most of their time in the building. There was a good turn-out of people - some principally interested the Museum & Art Gallery, some in the Brecon Library - on an exceptionally wet and windy evening in early November. Under the circumstances, it was difficult to keep track of those of our members who put their names forward - either to become volunteers or to be kept informed on opportunities as they develop. If you did either of these things could you possibly let me know by email or telephone (contact details at the head of the newsletter).

If you are interested in becoming involved in this way, please get in touch with me for a form or see our webpage at <http://www.brecknockociety.co.uk/news.html>. There will be a further meeting for new y Gaer Volunteers arranged by Andrea Mansfield, Powys CC's y Gaer volunteer coordinator, on Tuesday 12 February at 5.00pm in Brecon Library.

Special Interest Groups

Buildings of Breconshire Group On Saturday October 13th, despite widespread flooding, about twenty members had a fascinating visit to Trebarried near Llandefalle. This is a fine mid 17th C house, but one which suffered dilapidation and depredation before the present owners, Kenny and Helen Campbell, took over and began to cherish it. In the afternoon we were given a memorable tour of a nearby longhouse Cefnmachllys, sensitively restored by its owner Sam Hale.

In November, at quite short notice, a dozen members were invited by the owners, Annie and John, to visit the remarkable Hafod-y-Garreg, near Erwood. This has been described as the oldest house in Wales as it has a remarkable cusped cruck-truss which has been dated to 1402. It is hoped that a further visit can be made later this year.

Art in Breconshire Group. For some years, the Powys Group of the Art Fund has arranged events across the county. Rather surprisingly, a decision has been taken by the Art Fund, at the national level, to dismantle all its regional groups while working 'more directly' in support of Museums. Your Council is receptive to a proposal that locally-based members of the Powys Group, under the leadership of William Gibbs, should form an 'Art in Breconshire Group' within the BS&MF. This group would support the art exhibitions in the Museum & Art Gallery and would hold art-related events relevant to Breconshire that would be open to all members of the Society.

Developing a Brecon Heritage & Cultural Network

The initiative to provide a better linkage between all the bodies interested in the heritage and culture of the Brecon area has been successful in obtaining funding. A project manager will be in post soon.

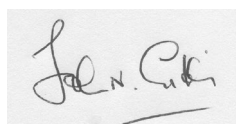
Forthcoming meetings of the Society

On Tuesday February 19th at 3.00pm in the Guildhall Council Chamber, Joe England will be speaking about 'Merthyr: Brecknock's Great Neighbour'. Joe is a very well-recognised authority on the history of Merthyr and we look forward to what he has to tell us.

'Writing History, the world of Theophilus Jones, our county Historian'. I hope that you have taken note of Prys Morgan's lecture on March 22nd. I can promise you a most enjoyable evening in the company of a remarkable man. Do please encourage friends and relatives to book seats: the arrangements are the same as in earlier years. There will be a meal after the lecture in the theatre restaurant (price £20 for main course and pudding). If you are interested in joining us, please contact Elaine Starling to reserve a place and choose from the menu before March 15th (01874 711484 or evstarling@lineone.net).

Annual General Meeting of the BS&MF. This will be on Monday April 8th 2.30 pm. Please regard this Newsletter as an invitation to the AGM although more information (including that on the venue) will be provided nearer the time.

Annual memorial evensong for Henry Vaughan. Sunday April 28th 3.00 pm at Llansantffraed Church.



John Gibbs