

GROUP FOR REGIONAL STUDIES IN MUSEUMS

NEWSLETTER No. 2 - MAY 1976

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## Editorial

Since the appearance of the first Newsletter in December of last year, the Group has entered its second year with more positive activity than it displayed in its first. Following the meeting at Norwich (reported in the last issue), a successful weekend was held in Penrith in February (report on page 4) and two further meetings are imminent, at Sticklepath in Devon and at the Staffordshire County Museum, Shugborough (details, page 7). In addition a meeting is being held in Stirling to launch a Scottish branch of the Group (details page 7) and we hope to carry reports on all these in the next issue of the Newsletter. Further meetings are being planned, including a weekend in Stoke in the Autumn and an A.G.M. in March 1977. Indeed our first A.G.M. is long overdue (on present practise, perhaps, occasional general meeting would be a more suitable description) and it is to be hoped that at this we shall be able to consolidate the beginnings we have made and provide a foundation for future activity.

Despite a recent appeal for material for this edition of the Newsletter, virtually nothing has been forthcoming and for this reason the present issue will be somewhat short in content. When envisaged, it was considered that the Newsletter could form a useful vehicle for the exchange of ideas, experiences and comments amongst members. However, if it is to be more than merely a programme of forthcoming meetings, it can only be successful through the contributions of members. So, please, send them in for subsequent issues?

### Report on the Weekend Meeting, Penrith 13th-15th February, 1976

Despite the cold weather, this was a most successful weekend, attended by 14 members. This, in the event, proved an ideal number for the weekend's programme, allowing everyone the time and space to get the most out of the site visits. Accommodation was booked in a small local hotel and being out of season, this proved relatively cheap. In addition comparatively little time was needed to organise accommodation and the programme. It would seem that meetings of this nature, based on one or two specialist topics in an area, with a limited number of people and using a local hotel out of season, could be a useful regular feature of the Group's activities and perhaps a running programme could be drawn up if members were prepared to organise these for their own areas.

Passing on to the weekend itself, this was given an excellent start by a comprehensive talk from Peter Brears on slip-ware pottery as a preface to the Saturday morning visit to Weatheriggs Pottery. The afternoon was spent at Little Salkeld Corn Mill and in the evening a member of the staff of the Cumberland Record Office, oblivious to the liquid needs of some of his audience, provided us with a marathon and exhaustive review of the history and settlement of the local area. Sunday was spent looking at some aspects of local vernacular architecture, finishing off with a visit to a local agricultural collection.

The principle concern of the weekend were the visits to the pottery and the mill, both of which have interesting implications for museums who are examining ideas for developing site museums. Weatheriggs Pottery, a few miles south of Penrith, was built in 1355 and has been in production to the present day, manufacturing traditional wares for local domestic and agricultural markets and since the Second War, as these markets declined, looking to the tourist trade. Bricks and drain-pipes were also made for a time. The pottery retains most of its original features and is an important site for anyone studying or interested in older techniques of potting (for details see P.C.D. Brears, The English Country Pottery, its History and Techniques, 1971). The pottery is now run by Jonathan Snell, his wife and

group of colleagues as a self-supporting business. Before taking over they had no experience in potting and were trained by Mr. H. Thornburn who had been associated with the pottery since 1916 and was latterly its owner. They continue to produce the traditional wares associated with the pottery, using the traditional techniques and find their market with the tourist trade. Through grants and by ploughing back profits, they are gradually restoring those original features which fell out of use and which they eventually hope to bring back into service. A blacksmith's shop on the site has been repaired and is now used by a local smith. A small 'museum' has also been set up around the old (1855) kiln showing the range of pots produced by the pottery over the years, some of the techniques of potting and the tools and equipment used.

The mill, at Little Salkeld, is a similar project. It was in use until recently, latterly largely producing cattle feed. After falling out of use, it was purchased two or three years ago by Nicholas Janes and his wife who are now involved in a thorough restoration to bring the whole building into working order. As with the pottery, the mill is being run as a self-supporting business and the present owners were instructed in the techniques of milling by John Fairbanks, Millwright, who is carrying out the restoration work. Mr. Fairbanks was present for the weekend and was able to provide us with much valuable practical information. One set of stones are now in working order and various grades of wholemeal flour are being ground for sale at the mill or through local grocers. The owners are also growing a certain amount of their own grain on land belonging to the mill. This they are doing using horse-drawn implements and bringing in a steam thresher for threshing. This experiment has gained both interest and active help from local farmers and proved a popular attraction for visitors.

Both the pottery and the mill are open to the public and encourage public interest, but they are both primarily working concerns using traditional work processes. So in the work areas, for their own safety and to prevent too great a disruption of work, the access of visitors has to be carefully controlled. The two projects give every appearance of being most successful and offer much more to visitors than merely a perambulation around a well-restored but static workshop. They are able to examine in detail all the work processes, ask questions and see the finished products. In addition such projects help to keep alive craft skills. Where it is possible (and there does seem to be a number of areas connected with crafts and agriculture) this type of scheme is one which the museum world might consider as a worthwhile development. There are a number of similar ventures to those which were visited at Penrith, but these are being mainly undertaken by private interests or bodies other than museums. At Stott Park in Furness, the Department of the Environment are restoring an old bobbin mill and exploring the possibility of running this as a working concern with public access. The Gladstone Pottery Museum in Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, is another where the work processes demonstrated in the workshops are a most important part of the museum concept.

Little Salkeld Mill and Weatheriggs Pottery are both run as profit-making concerns and this approach should have advantages to museums considering similar ventures, particularly in the present economic climate. Thus once an initial capital outlay has been made for restoration and renovation, future running costs and staff wages can be met from the profits. While local authorities are in principle opposed to managing profit-making concerns largely for the perfectly justifiable reason that they do not wish to compete with and damage the interests of local trades and industries, schemes like the pottery or the mill have the further advantage that they are unlikely to conflict with any local trade interests. To embark on similar projects

museums would need to be sure that certain requirements could be met. In the first instance there would need to be available the necessary skilled labour either to provide a workforce or to train staff. It is important in schemes of this sort that the quality of workmanship is consistently high and that the work processes involved can be competently and correctly carried out. Secondly a strict control would need to be exercised to ensure that the project did not become commercialised and lose its original sense of purpose which was to demonstrate traditional work processes and to supply traditional finished products. Profit-making in its own right is not objectionable, as long as the profit accrues through adherence to the principle purpose of the scheme. Finally, for the scheme to be self-supporting, a viable market would need to exist for the finished product. Both Weatheriggs and Little Salkeld demonstrated that such schemes can be commercially viable, while still following strictly traditional work processes and encouraging visitors to study these. Their success is encouraging for museums who might wish to consider similar projects.

## Other Societies

I would like to recommend to the attention of those members of the Group who may not be aware of them, two societies which they may find of interest.

### 1. Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage

This was formed in January 1975, to act, in the words of its prospectus, "as a forum for the exchange of views and news on the interpretation of the urban and rural heritage of Britain." Again to use the Society's own words, "Britain's Heritage is taken to consist of her natural, historical and cultural environment together with influences from the past on present-day life and current activities." Membership of the Society comprises individuals from a wide range of professional groups and private bodies, including Local Authority Planning Departments, the Forestry Commission, the Tourist Board, the National Trust and Museums.

Interpretation is certainly a fashionable concern at present and its attraction to different organisations and bodies is reflected by the wide range of professional interests represented in the Society. If museums are not to logg out to others, it is an area where they should make their views felt. Membership of this Society is encouraged for this reason and also because we have much professional experience and expertise to offer in this field.

The Society holds a number of meetings in the course of the year and produces a thrice yearly Newsletter. Membership is £2.00 p.a. and details can be obtained from Martin Orrom, Secretary, c/o Forestry Commission, 231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh. E.H.12 7AT.

### 2. Oral History Society

The Oral History Society was formed in 1974 following a meeting in York. Its membership comprises social scientists, social historians and students of folk-life and it is broadly concerned with all aspects of community life and work whose history can be elucidated through oral testimony. It has not set itself up as an exclusively academic body, as it claims, "anyone with a tape recorder can make a vital contribution to our activities."

As well as holding Conferences and Meetings, it produces an excellent journal which, to date, has included papers on agricultural topics, food and diet and one whole issue devoted to family life. The journal also includes a useful section outlining current recording work being carried out by organisations or individuals. Membership enquiries should be addressed to Paul Thompson, Sociology Department, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex.

Recent Books and Publications

1. A. Fenton, Scottish Country Life, John Donald, 1976, pp.255 £6.50  
 An excellent study by Mr. Fenton, of the Country Life Section of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, of the history and change in Scottish rural society, well illustrated with photographs from the National Museum archives. Topics covered include farming, fuel, transport, crafts and trades, fairs and markets, food and drink and aspects of community life.

2. S. Minwell Tibbott, Welsh Fare, A Selection of Traditional Recipes, National Museum of Wales, 1976, pp.84, £2.25

This is an English translation of the 1974 Welsh Edition. It is drawn from work done by the Department of Oral Traditions and Dialect in the National Museum and is essentially a recipe book. The recipes selected are those which have played a specific role in the history of Welsh Food. There is a short introduction and each recipe is accompanied by brief historical notes. Well illustrated with photographs taken either in buildings at St. Fagan's or in homes in the Welsh Countryside.

3. J.G. Jenkins, Welsh Crafts and Craftsmen, Welsh Folk Museum, 1975, 90p.

A wide ranging survey of Welsh Crafts including those generally found, textiles, leather, pottery etc., together with more specifically Welsh crafts such as coracle building; love spoon and broth spoon making and rarer examples such as making slate jars, a by-product of the slate industry. There is an appendix of present craft producers in Wales and the volume is illustrated with photographs of contemporary craftsmen and photographs from the museum's archives.

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|----|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| 4. | J. G. Jenkins,           | <u>Esqair Mool Woollen Mill</u> , | Welsh Folk Museum,                | 1975       |
|    | "                        | "                                 | <u>Rhaeadr Tannery</u> ,          | " " " 1973 |
|    | "                        | "                                 | <u>Boat House and Net House</u> , | " " " 1973 |
|    | E. Scourfield,           | <u>Welsh Farming Scene</u> ,      | " " "                             | 1974       |
|    | J.G. Jenkins & A. Davies | <u>Wood-Turner's Craft</u>        | " " "                             |            |

These five publications produced by the Welsh Folk Museum, are part of a series of guides being produced for re-erected buildings, galleries or craft workshops within the museum. The first two, for the mill and tannery, give a history of the buildings, a description of the work processes and are illustrated with photographs and drawings. The third volume is a guide to accompany the recently opened fishing display and is a general survey of Welsh fishing techniques rather than a specific guide. Similarly "Welsh Farm Scene" which is to accompany the newly opened agricultural gallery. "The Wood-Turner's Craft" is a bilingual (Welsh/English) volume, complementing the demonstration work carried out by Gwyndal Breese, the wood turner employed at St. Fagans.

Directory of Craftsmen

It was suggested by John Gall, Beamish Museum, that the Newsletter might begin to compile a directory of working craftsmen: who could be of use to museums either in restoration of artefacts or in making replicas to patterns supplied by museums, in an acceptable fashion and of an acceptable standard. This seems to be an admirable idea and any member who knows of such craftsmen might like to send details to me for inclusion in the newsletter. There follows a list compiled by the time of this issue.

Tinsmith

Arnold Cole, Mountain Ash, Glamorgan, Wales.

Wood-Turner

Gwyndal Breese, Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagans.

Osier Basket Maker

H. Cobham, Ormskirk, (can be contacted through Lancashire Museum)

Saddler and Harness Maker

J. Houghton and Son, 11&13 Bolton Road, Darwen, Lancashire.

Cair Mat Maker

F. Smith

Wheelwright

Vehicle Restorer and Line Painter, T. Murphy

} can be contacted through Beamish Museum

Northumbrian Pipe Maker and Instrument Restorer

Millwright

J. Fairbanks, Builders Yard, Oulton, Stone, Staffs.

## Future Meetings

### 1. Staffordshire County Museum, Shugborough, June 10th

A one-day meeting on farm museums, details and application form are included with the Newsletter at the end. It is hoped to allow time in the programme for a short meeting of the Midlands regional group to discuss future activities.

### 2. Stirling, 28th May

This meeting is being held to launch a Scottish branch of the GRSM and the programme is:-

10.30-11.00	Arrival and Coffee
11.00-12.00	Talk: 'Folk-life and Museum' - J. Baldwin
12.00-12.30	Discussion
12.30-1.30	Lunch
1.30-2.30	'Where have all the Objects Gone?' - discussion led by Graeme Cruickshank
2.30-2.45	Coffee
2.45-4.00	Open forum on future plans and activities for the Group in Scotland led by Graeme Farrell (Inverness Museum) and Elspeth King (People's Palace, Glasgow).

The meeting is being held in the Talbooth, St. John Street, Stirling, those wishing to attend should contact Graeme Cruickshank, Huntly House Museum, 142 Canongate, Edinburgh EH3 8DD.

Two further meetings are in the planning stage.

### 1. Stoke-on-Trent

A meeting is being planned by David Sekers for the Autumn based on aspects of urban interpretation in the Potteries.

### 2. Dyffryn House, St. Nicholas, Cardiff

A weekend meeting and AGM has been provisionally arranged for March 18th-21st, 1977, at Dyffryn House with a programme based on the Welsh Folk Museum.

Details of both these meetings will be circulated as soon as they are finalised.



Meetings of interest held by other bodies

1. The Craft of the Mason July 10th-17th
2. Vernacular Architecture of Anglesey July 17th-24th

Both these are field courses held in Bangor and run by the University of Manchester, Extra-Mural Studies Department and the cost of the week is £50 covering tuition, accommodation and meals. Details of the courses can be obtained from Mrs. Lynn Palethorpe, Box E, The University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL (Tel 061-273-3333 ext. 246).

3. Beaulieu 10th-12th September

A meeting of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage. Details can be obtained from the Secretary, Martin Orrom (address page 4).

4. York, 23rd-27th September,

Annual meeting of the Society of Folk Life Studies. Details can be obtained from the secretary, R.A. Gailey, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra Manor, Holywood. BT18 OEU, N. Ireland.

5. Oral Local History University of Keele - Courses for Adults.

A 2-day exploratory conference, July 23rd-25th. Contributors will include:

1. Margaret Brooks - Department of Sound Archives, Imperial War Museum.
2. Trefor Owen - Curator, Welsh Folk Museum
3. Pamela Murray - Curator of the County Museum, Shugborough, Staffordshire.
4. Dorothy McCulla - Head of Local Studies, Birmingham Central Libraries.

Membership

Membership of the Group for Regional Studies in Museums is £1 p.a. due on the 1st April, each year. Details are available from P. Brears, Castle Museum, York and subscriptions should be sent to Mrs. P. Murray, Staffordshire County Museum Shugborough, Stafford. ST17 OXB

Officers and Committee

Chairman: J.G. Jenkins (Welsh Folk Museum); Secretary-Convenor: P. Brears (Castle Museum, York); Treasurer: Mrs. P. Murray (Staffordshire County Museum, Shugborough); Editor: R. Langhome (Lancashire Museum, Preston); Committee - G. Cruickshank (Huntly House, Edinburgh), J. Gall (North of England Open Air Museum, Beamish), D. Janes (Art Gallery and Museum, Bury), B. Turner (Ulster Museum, Belfast), Miss B. Yates (Castle Museum, Norwich).

Staffordshire County Museum - Shugborough

One day meeting of G.R.S.M. June 10th, 1976

Farm Museums.

The meeting will be held at Shugborough Park Farm, one of the farms on the Shugborough Estate, built in 1809 and at present undergoing restoration by museum staff.

10.30 Coffee

10.50 (app) Introduction

11.00-1.00 Shugborough Park Farm. Outline of the project's aims, time schedules, and finance. Speakers will include Pamela Murray (Curator); John Rhodes (Keeper of Social History); Alan Cheese (Assistant Keeper - Natural History). This period will include time for inspection of the farm and livestock.

1.00-2.00 Lunch at the farm.

2.00-4.00 1. Cogges Farm; Oxfordshire County Museum. Representatives from Woodstock will include Rickard Foster, John Rhodes and Christine Bloxham.

2. North of England Open Air Museum, Beamish. John Gall.

3. Discussions.

4.30 (app) Area meeting of G.R.S.M. - Future meetings.

It is anticipated that the meeting will be very informal and will give an opportunity for exchange of ideas on the philosophy and interpretation of the projects as well as practical problems of restoration, design, financing and public use. Please note that the venue is a farm, and a half-restored one at that, so come suitably clad.

The cost will be minimal, possibly 75p, payable at the meeting.

Please return the form below as soon as possible (end of May).

I wish to attend the 1 day meeting at Shugborough Park Farm (Group for Regional Studies in Museums) June 10th.

Name..... Address .....

Tel: No.....

I would like transport to and from Stafford Station c. 10.00 a.m. and c. 5.30 p.m.

I would like overnight accommodation (please state which night) .....

(Up to 5 or 6 can be accommodated by Shugborough Staff.)