

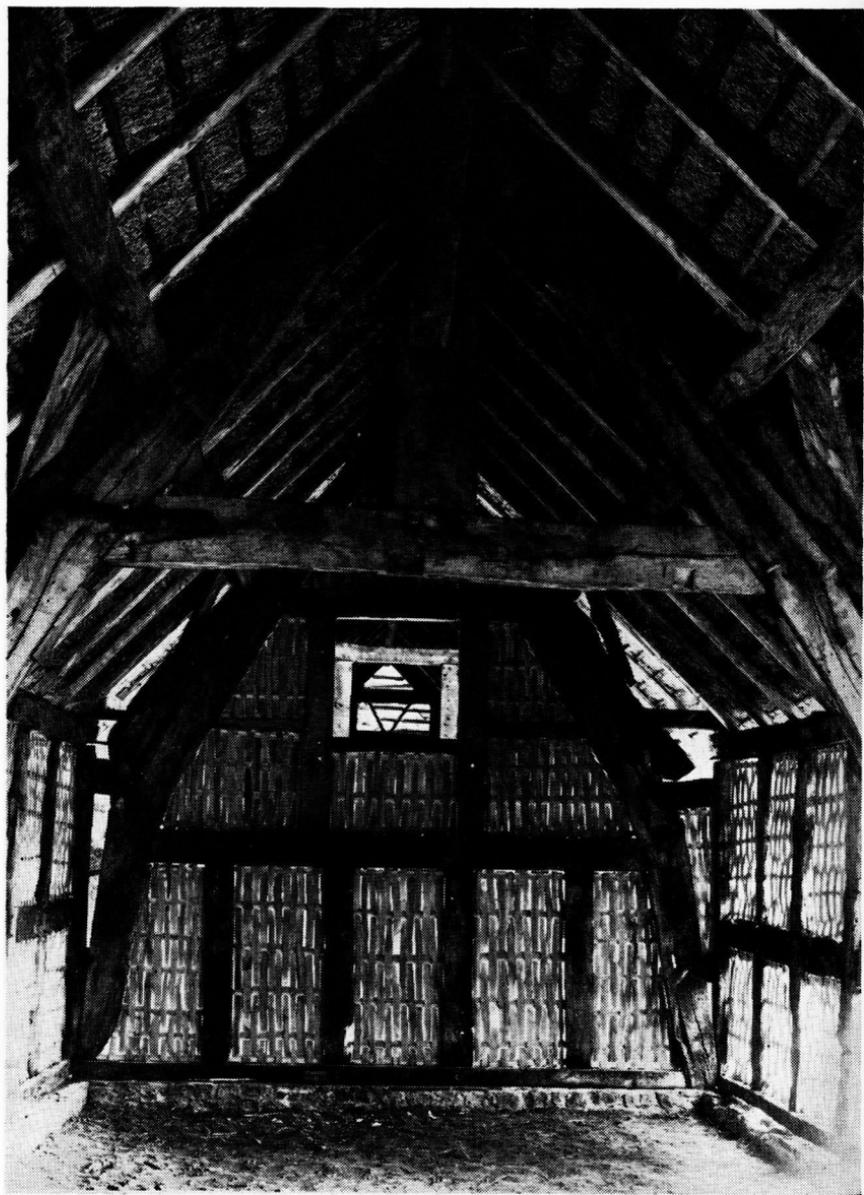
SOME WELSH HISTORIC BUILDINGS

By Iorwerth C. Peate, M.A., D.Sc., F.S.A., F.M.A.

THE Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans, near Cardiff, was opened to the public in 1948. Its primary purpose is to illustrate the life and culture of the Welsh nation: its method of doing so is broadly similar to that of the great Scandinavian folk museums. At St. Fagans, the Folk Museum will consist of (1) a modern block of buildings which will include exhibition galleries and store-rooms, library, a theatre for lectures, plays and music, a laboratory and store-room for the collection of recordings of oral traditions, students rooms, restaurant and offices, etc., (2) an open-air section.

Since the scheme for the modern block will cost more than a quarter of a million pounds and funds for this purpose have not yet been available, work during the folk museum's first seven years has been concentrated on the development of the open-air section. The museum is fortunate in possessing approximately one hundred acres of land upon which it can reconstruct in miniature a picture of the Welsh past, beginning with the 16th-century house, St. Fagans Castle, and its grounds, a gift by the Earl of Plymouth to Wales as a base for the development of a national folk museum. This exhibit is maintained to illustrate the setting of a Welsh nobleman's life during the past four hundred years. When the work on the restoration of the Castle was completed, attention was given to rescuing for re-erection at St. Fagans a number of historic buildings which would otherwise have been destroyed. It was aimed to rescue one each year: this has been achieved. A brief list will indicate the nature of these buildings:

- (1) Esgair Moel Woollen Factory, near Llanwrtyd, Brecknockshire. This building was erected about 1760 and developed as the business expanded in the 19th century. Its last textile worker died in 1947, and the building was rapidly deteriorating in 1949 when it was offered, with all its machinery, to the Folk Museum. It was removed completely, re-erected, the machinery placed in working order, and opened to the public in 1951. It is now in full production.
- (2) A timber-framed cruck barn, about 1550-1600, Stryt Lydan, near Penley, Flintshire, opened to the public, 1950.



Barn from Stryt Lydan, near Penley, Flintshire, dated 1550-1600, as re-erected at the Welsh Folk Museum.



Esgair Moel Woollen Factory, Llanwrtyd, Brecknockshire.



Long-house at Ciloerwynt, Dyffryn Claerwen, Radnorshire.

- (3) Abernodwydd, Llangadfan, Montgomeryshire, a timber-framed farmhouse, about 1600, last occupied about 1935 and later used as a cattle-shed. Opened to the public, 1955.
- (4) Kennixton, Gower, Glamorgan. A substantial stone farmhouse, built and added to between 1630 and 1730. This house was evacuated in 1939 when a new farmhouse was built nearby. Its removal to St. Fagans meant the handling of 400 tons of stone several times: it was opened to the public in 1955.
- (5) Capel Pen-rhiw, Dre-fach, Vale of Teifi, Carmarthenshire. This was an old building converted into a Unitarian chapel in 1777, its original pews, gallery (early 19th century) and pulpit being rescued. Not yet opened to the public.
- (6) Ciloerwynt, Dyffryn Claerwen, Radnorshire. A typical long-house of 16th-17th century date renovated in 1734 and occupied until 1954 when a new farmhouse was built nearby to replace it. Removed to St. Fagans but not yet re-erected.
- (7) Hendrerwydd uchaf, Llangynhafal, Denbighshire. A Vale of Clwyd cruck-built house with a central hearth and late 15th-century features. Removed to St. Fagans but not yet re-erected.
- (8) Llainfadyn, Rhostryfan, Caernarvonshire. A typical Caernarvonshire *croglloffi* cottage set on a plinth of large boulders: internal slate partition and furniture "platform". Awaiting removal in 1956.

The specialized work of dismantling and re-erecting these buildings is carried out by a small team of skilled workers. Experience has shown that it is essential that the men who dismantle the buildings shall also re-erect them. No work is let out on contract and none of the material handled by any persons other than members of the staff, under the supervision of the Curator. When a house is to be dismantled, two members of the Museum staff, the foreman being one of them, visit the building and remain at work in it for a period of two to four weeks. Their task is to prepare a series of scale-drawings and full notes on all details of construction, number all individual timbers and stones, marking corresponding numbers on the plans, and to prepare a detailed report on the setting of the building e.g. the farmyard, site and type of trees, garden plans, walls and ditches etc. During this stage it is generally possible to work out the evolution of the building throughout the centuries, most remaining problems being solved when the building is actually in course of demolition. At the same time, a detailed photographic survey is also carried out. The two men are then joined by a mason and a labourer and demolition begun. The surveying and dismantling of none of the eight buildings referred to above have taken more than three months' time. For the transport of the

materials to St. Fagans, a reputable heavy-haulage firm is employed, the loading and unloading being carried out by Museum workers.

At the Museum end, the site of the "new" building has to be decided upon, care being taken to ensure that ground levels, approaches etc. are as similar as possible to those on the original site. Exact reproduction of the original site is of course impossible but the orientation of each building, the approach road, lane, or path, the disposition of the garden etc., can be reproduced. All the timbering is carefully inspected, all doubtful pieces being rejected and the remainder treated for the elimination of wood-worm. The re-erection work is then undertaken by the team of four with the assistance of other members of the staff. It is not my purpose here to discuss costs but it may be stated that the work is more efficiently and cheaply carried out in this manner than by any other method known to the writer.

The choice of buildings as exhibits in a Folk Museum is, of course, of great importance. The offer of a house as a gift can be made unexpectedly or may be the result of long and patient negotiation. Certain types of Welsh houses—and the same is true of other countries—demand a place naturally in a folk museum, in view of their social and architectural significance and of their rapid disappearance from the countryside because of new conceptions of hygiene etc. Such is the long-house occupied by beast and man alike, the cows being separated from the dwelling end by a transverse passage only. Modern dairy requirements and the present standard demanded for the sale of milk have finally condemned this type to sudden extinction. Yet from Neolithic times to the 20th century it has played an important part in the social structure of north-western Europe. Twenty years ago, a small selection of interesting Welsh long-houses was noted and their fate during the intervening years followed carefully. When the new Claerwen reservoir in Radnorshire was opened, it appeared obvious that one of these houses (See 6, p.82) would soon disappear. A new dwelling-house was built by the owners, Birmingham City Corporation, and the old house presented to the Welsh Folk Museum.

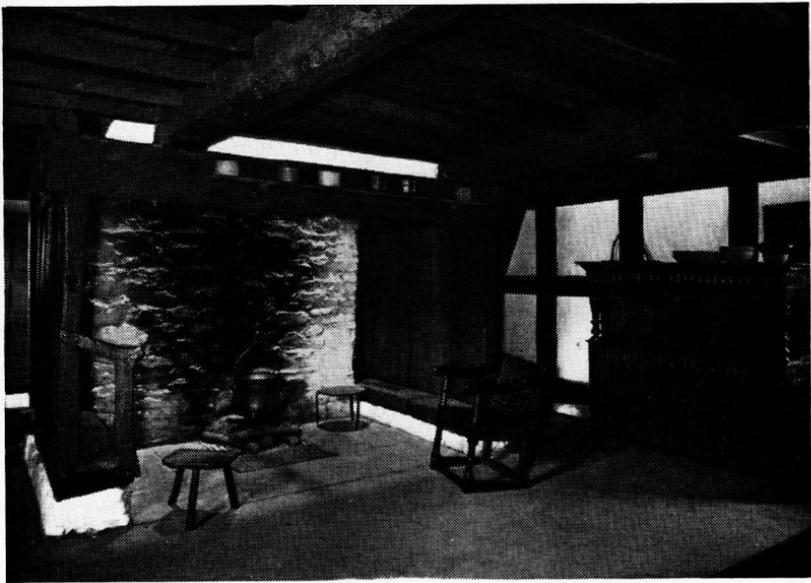
A valuable folk-museum exhibit may present a mean and unattractive appearance when seen in its final decrepit condition: it needs imaginative vision to picture it re-erected in its former glory on the Museum site. The Esgair Moel woollen factory (See 1, p.79) was such a building. It had lost its whitewash almost completely, its walls were disintegrating and its stone-tiled roof had been replaced many years ago by thin Welsh slates. When it was first inspected, some friends dismissed it contemptuously as a miserable shack. But once re-erected, it has proved to be one of the most attractive features of the Welsh Folk Museum, and represents there a rural industry which has been of exceptional importance in the Welsh past.



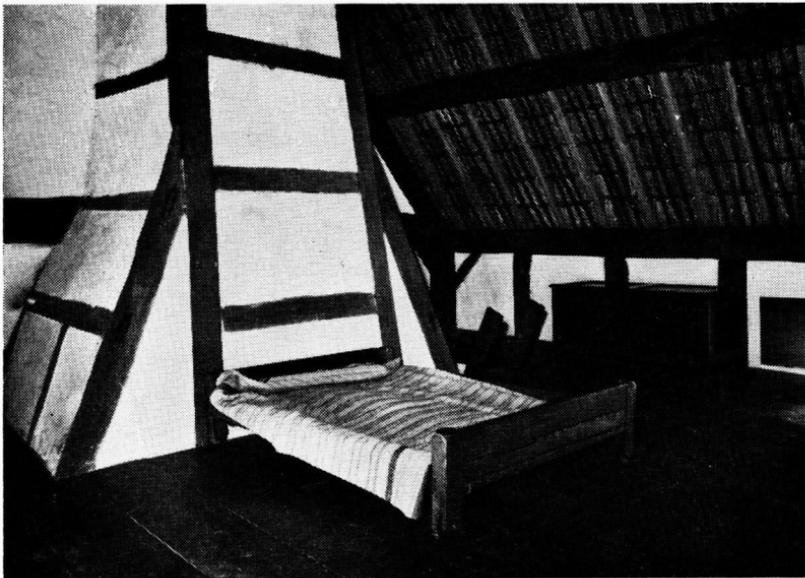
Kennixton: a bedroom. Note the plaited wheat-straw mats which form the underthatch of the roof. These are a feature of the house.



Kennixton, Gower, Glamorgan, as re-erected at St. Fagans.



The hall fireplace.



Abernodwydd, Llangadfan, Montgomeryshire—c. 1600,
as re-erected at the Welsh Folk Museum.

The Caernarvonshire cottage (See 8, p.82) represents a type discussed by Hughes and North¹ and is illustrated in *The Welsh House*.² The size of the stones at the base of the walls is enormous, their bottom course standing forward a little, increasing the effect of stability. The *croglofft*, a loft above the sleeping end only and reached by a ladder from the living-room floor, is still characteristic of all the western counties from Anglesey to Pembroke but is also found inland (as in east Montgomeryshire.³) It is hoped to find later an example for the Folk Museum of the simple one-roomed cottage with no internal division or loft. Typologically, this is the earliest form of habitation still surviving in this island.

Nonconformist chapels suffered greatly in Wales as in England during the 19th century. Down to about 1820-30 on the Welsh moorland these were simple, severe, barn-like structures reflecting indeed the experience of the early congregations which had their meetings in barns, the "granaries of God". Few of these early meeting-houses escaped unscathed from the fashions of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Two such are outstanding: Capel Newydd, Nanhoron, Caernarvonshire, built in the 18th century and slightly altered early in the following century, and Capel Pen-rhiw (See 5, p.82) now being re-erected at the Welsh Folk Museum. This chapel with its two doors (it was formerly customary for men and women to sit apart during services) and the pulpit between them in the middle of the long front side, has interesting box-pews made for the chapel and a gallery round three sides, held on wooden pillars. Such galleries were a feature of Nonconformist chapels, the aim being to increase accommodation without adding unduly to the size of the building, particularly where the purchase of land was difficult (owing to the prejudice of most landowners against the early Nonconformists) and funds unobtainable. The complete design is honest and straightforward and has none of the defects of most Victorian Gothic chapels.

The value of bringing together to a national centre examples of ancient buildings (which would otherwise be destroyed) of architectural and social significance cannot be overestimated. They can provide, in the words of a Swedish author, "a deep well of living waters invigorating the soul of the nation". This is the aim which the Welsh Folk Museum has set out to achieve and this present paper is offered as a report on what has been accomplished during the first seven years of the Museum's existence.

¹ Hughes, H. Harold and North, H. L.: *The Old Cottages of Snowdonia* (1905).

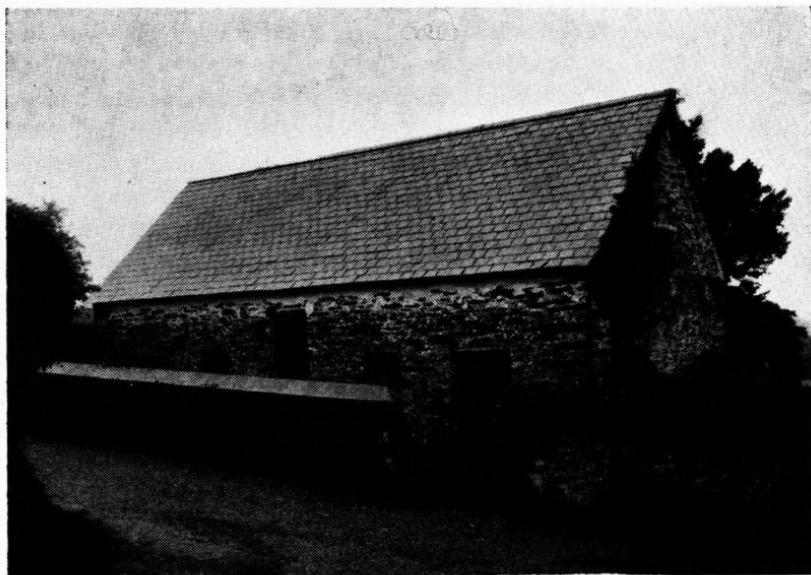
² Peate, Iorwerth C.: *The Welsh House* (1944) Plates 46 and 74.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 98 ff.

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The interior before removal to the Welsh Folk Museum



Capel Pen-rhiw, Dre-fach, Vale of Teifi.