



*A. J. Taylor article for The Times, July 1953*



*Raglan Castle, Monmouthshire - the poor condition of the interior. Amelia de Suffren, 1802. Aquatint. Amelia was the widow of a French admiral who lived in London. She toured Wales in 1802-3 recording many views including this rather whimsical view of Raglan. These were then published by her in her studio (No. 8 Blandford St.) as aquatints. Her other views can be seen in the collection of the National Library of Wales, who have nine examples of her work, including Chepstow and Cardiff castles, Llanthornay, and Tintern Abbey.*

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***The Land of Castles: Saving the Famous Monuments of Wales.***

*By A. J. Taylor Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Wales.*

(The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited Caernarvon Castle on Friday July 6th during their two day visit to Wales).

Forty years ago the First Commissioner of Works, Earl Beauchamp, outlined the principles the Commissioners would follow in maintaining the one hundred or so monuments placed in their care since the passing of the first Ancient Monuments Protection Act in 1882. Their aim would be to avoid, so far as possible, anything which could be considered in the nature of restoration and to do nothing which could impair the monument's archaeological interest. They would confine themselves to the work needed to preserve the monuments in the form in which

they had come down to us. Since then the Office and its successor, the Ministry of Works, have been applying these principles to a variety of monuments of outstanding interest whose preservation could not otherwise have been secured. There are now over 500 such monuments in the direct control of the State, some because they are historic properties of the Crown, the majority as the result of guardianship arrangements made with private owners under powers conferred by the Ancient Monuments Acts of 1913 and 1931. Ranging in place from the Scillies to the Shetlands and in period and character from Neolithic burial chambers to nineteenth-century windmills, they include many of the best known memorials of the history and pre-history of these islands. The purpose of this article is to illustrate the way in which this work has been carried on in one conveniently defined area in the years since 1945.





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Wales, by reason of its history, is predominantly the land of castles, and it is no surprise to find that of the 90-odd nationally maintained monuments in the Principality more than a third belong to this category. Some (such as Ewloe, near Chester, or Dolwyddelan, in Snowdonia) are native Welsh castles; others are the more elaborate fortresses of the Edwardian conquest. Conservation work has been in hand since the war at about a dozen of these sites, the more notable undertakings being at Raglan, in Monmouthshire, Carreg Cennen, in Carmarthenshire, and Rhuddlan, in Flintshire. Besides the routine operation of waterproofing wall tops, securing loose masonry and grouting and re-pointing standing walls, each monument presents its own task of special interest.

**Royalist Stronghold**

At Raglan this has been to forestall the threatened collapse of part of the great fifteenth-century hexagonal keep-tower. In the Civil War the keep of Raglan symbolized, more perhaps than any other single building, the tenacity of the Royalist cause in the west. After lesser garrisons had surrendered, Raglan and Pendennis, like Winter fruit, hung long on. When, after a siege conducted by Fairfax in person, the Marquess of Worcester finally capitulated, the Roundheads wreaked their vengeance by undermining two sides of his cherished citadel. Robbed of its cohesion, the surviving structure was in torn and fractured condition when, three centuries later, Lord Worcester's descendent, the present Duke of Beaufort, placed the castle in the Ministry's custody.

To avert a major fall, it was decided in 1947 to reconstruct so much as was necessary of the adjoining destroyed masonry at Raglan to support the remainder of the tower, there being adequate evidence in the building itself to permit faithful reproduction of architectural detail. Facing stone from the region of the medieval quarries at Penallt on the Wye is already weathering to the shade of the original work, and the survival of this imposing structure is now sure.

The history of Carreg Cennen was terminated nearly two hundred years earlier than that of Raglan - curiously enough through the agency of Raglan men. In 1462, attracted by its inaccessibility and aided by the lawlessness of the times, "the mys governed men of that cuntre there entendid to have enhabited the same castell and to have lyved by robberye and spolyng oure people of the contre there." Accordingly William, Lord Herbert of Raglan, friend of Edward IV and Chamberlain of South Wales, sent a force from Monmouthshire "to breke and throwe down the said castell."

The Ministry of Works began in 1947 to consolidate the standing masonry and to disengage the buried walls from the debris under which they have lain for nearly five centuries. The work has revealed unexpectedly impressive remains, greatly enhancing the interest of a castle notable for its rugged situation in a remote and unspoiled countryside.

Neath Abbey, on the other hand, stands amid the scars and spoil heaps of the southern seaboard. Long neglected and for a considerable time turned to industrial uses, it is the largest of the Welsh Cistercian houses, with the shell of its church and much of its conventual buildings still standing, the latter adapted as an Elizabethan mansion. Since the War the Ministry have treated and laid out the church and the cloister garth is now a lawn again. A road skirting the west front has been diverted to allow the creation of a green foreground to the abbey buildings.

Another major task has been the restitution of the 50ft. wide upper moat at Rhuddlan Castle. Rhuddlan belongs to the first group of fortresses begun by Edward I in 1277, and is famous as the scene of the promulgation in 1284 of the Statute of Wales. The work on the moat, by clearing away modern obstructions and the silt and humus of six centuries, has revealed the true proportions of the original defences. Rhuddlan, started six years before





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Harlech and 18 before Beaumaris, now takes its place beside them as a no less striking example of the "concentric" castle plan.

**Nation's Responsibility**

The majority of the larger medieval monuments are now the nation's responsibility. So are important Roman remains at Caerleon and Caerwent. The number of new transfers may be expected to diminish, but much work remains to be done on monuments already accepted. Its specialized nature requires that it shall not be hurried, and considerations of labour and finance inevitably impose their own brake on the speed with which a long-neglected monument can be made safe, weatherproof, and fully accessible to public enjoyment. The treatment of Conway Castle and town walls, to the moves for the protection of which The Times has lent its strong support, is estimated to take 20 years. As announced to-day this work now becomes the responsibility of the Ministry of Works under a 99-year lease.

Caerphilly Castle, assigned in guardianship by the Marquess of Bute in 1950, is another monument of stupendous size, the adequate presentation of which in a manner worthy of the scale and majesty of the original conception can only be achieved gradually. Caerphilly occupies a low-lying site which depended for its strength on artificial water defences. A major undertaking will be the replacement of the lake to the south of the castle, and the clearing of the moats which joined it to the northern lake. Meanwhile work is proceeding on the repair of the great hall, where it is believed sufficient evidence is available to allow a faithful reinstatement of the mullions and tracery of the four great early fourteenth-century windows. In all this the Ministry are pursuing, broadly speaking, the practice of Lord Bute's predecessors, who carried out extensive restorations before 1939, though these included a degree of structural rebuilding which it would be contrary to the Ministry's policy to continue.

**Ugly Surroundings**

Another building whose care the Ministry have recently undertaken is the little Cistercian abbey of Valle Crucis, near Llangollan. Here the immediate tasks are to, safeguard dangerous masonry and restore proper levels, to drain the cloister and bring back the waters to the dried-out fishpond, so that they may once more reflect the slender grace of the eastern lancets - in short, to re-create the abbey as a lovely place deserving reverence and seemliness as of right. Once these aims have been achieved, it will then remain to try to get rid of certain discordant and ugly elements in the abbey's surroundings which at present mar the tranquillity and the harmony of its setting.

A brief survey has necessarily to dwell on a few well-known monuments. Of the rest, upon a score of which work has also lately been in hand, only passing mention can be made. In Glamorgan the Ministry have laid out, for the local authority, the footings of two gateways of the newly discovered Roman fort at Neath. In the Vale, near Bridgend, repairs are in progress to the embattled precinct of Ewenny Priory and to the little courtyard house at Beaupre, whose beautiful Elizabethan porches are the most finished specimens of their period in all Wales. At Caernarvon (which the Queen is to visit this week (July 1953)) the town walls, long hidden behind later structures, have been shown to striking advantage against a grassed foreground. The tower of Dolbadarn, guardian of the Llanberis Pass, has gained interest from the excavation of its enclosing walls and attendant buildings.

The tale here told does no more than place on record the work being done in this particular field in only one, and that the smallest, of the three territories of the United Kingdom. The available resources are small; the direct labour force operating under the direction of the Ministry's specialists numbers little more than 100. But within the limits imposed a methodical attempt is being made to ensure the stability and accentuate the interest of the famous monuments of Wales.

*A J Taylor*

