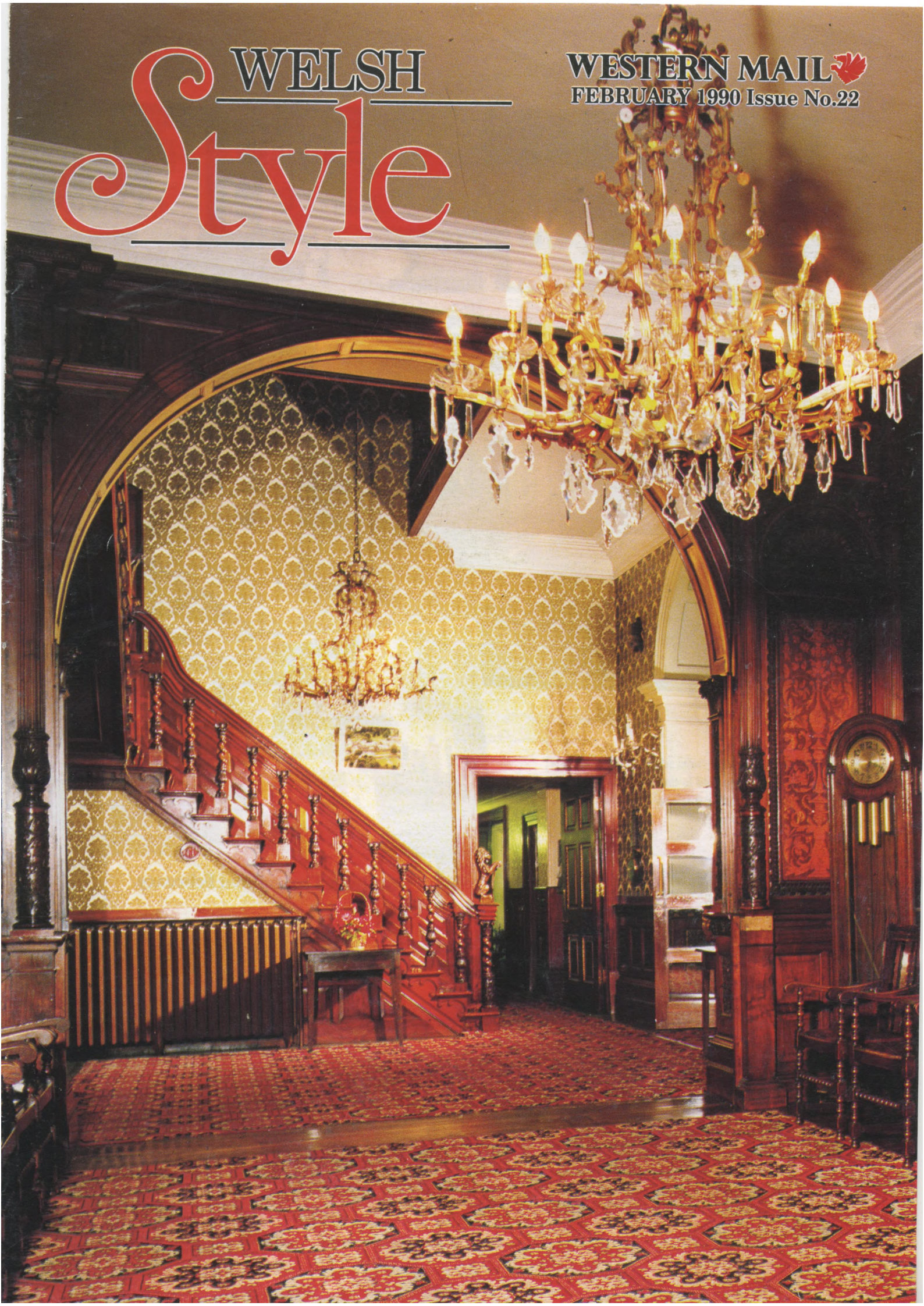


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'HOSPITAL WITH A HEALTHY FUTURE'

IN THE SUMMER of 1986 there was something of a stir at Talygarn, near Pontyclun, on the rediscovery in St Ann's Church of a Byzantine mosaic, which experts soon identified as one of the original heads, made about 1070, the sixth Apostle on the right of the famous *Last Judgement* mosaic on the west wall of the original cathedral of Venice, on the island of Torcello.

Quite a find; and a year later quite a windfall for the church when it went, via Sothebys, to an American for £240,000, part of which went on restoration of St Ann's, and the rest on community projects — all due to the sharp eyes of Rev Martin Reynolds.

What was the mosaic doing so far from home? Apparently an unscrupulous restorer, Giovanni Moro, had replaced some of the original heads by copies in 1853. He later sold one to unsuspecting buyer G T Clark, who visited Venice in 1885. Clark had bought Talygarn previously, and in 1887 he gave the mosaic to St Ann's, a new church he had built in memory of his wife Ann who died in 1885.

The church replaced, and was next to, an ancient chapel-of-ease, which had been restored exactly 200 years earlier under the will of one of the most famous of men in the neighbourhood, Sir Leoline Jenkins, who was born near Talygarn in 1625. He had an illustrious career in civil law; was MP, Secretary of State and diplomat, and was principal of Jesus College, Oxford for 12 years; accentuating its Welsh character. He would have been horrified to know that 100 years later, Jesus College would only pay for repairs at the Chapel-of-ease by stopping the

There were painted ceilings from Venice, marble fireplaces from Verona, tiles from Naples, marquetry doors from Vicenza, needlework from Milan. Amazingly most of it is still there. JOHN I HOWELLS visits Talygarn.

poor curate's pay until enough had been saved.

Talygarn was a lordship, but originally a Welsh one rather than Norman it is thought. In more modern times the lordship was held by Jenkins, and later Lord Talbot, of Hensol, before being sold to G T Clark.

There was a manor house of the lordship of course and 15th century windows were found there. There is evidence of a house on the site in 1313, when Thomas Ddu lived there. His last descendant was Ann David, who was there in the early 17th century. In the 18th century the Pritchards of Colonna were in residence.

When Clark bought Talygarn in 1865, for £7,600, he described it as a "queer, rambling sort of house" damp and leaking. The previous owner had been Rev Dr William Lisle, something of an eccentric, who is supposed to have kept a snake pit to provide him with specimens for his works as a poisons expert. He had made some improvements to the house and grounds but it was Clark who transformed the house into the rather grand one it is today.

George Thomas Clark became one of

the most prominent men in South Wales during the second half of the 19th century. He was not Welsh, having been born in Chelsea in 1809, where his father was a chaplain at Chelsea hospital. Some of his forbears, particularly the two Samuel Clarks, were distinguished theologians in the 17th and 18th centuries. G T's mother was Clara Dacey from Claybrooke Manor on the Leicestershire border.

After Charterhouse, George Clark qualified as an engineer, working later with Brunel on the GWR, as well as on government work in India. He had also had some medical training, which no doubt led him to become one of the three commissioners of the General Board of Health, making in 1849 a thorough and scathing report of the sanitary conditions in Swansea.

In 1850, George married Ann Price Lewis, daughter of Henry Lewis, of Greenmeadow in Tongwynlais, one of the branches of the noted Lewises of Y Fan, a family that provided 17 High Sheriffs over 300 years. Ann's great grandfather, Thomas Lewis, was one of the founders of the Dowlais Iron Co in 1759; the family did not sell out to Sir Josiah John Guest until 1850. Clark had known the Guests since at least 1835; and he was asked to be a trustee of Sir John's will just before the latter's death in 1852.

From this time, until 1897, George Clark was resident trustee at Dowlais, and was responsible for its success as one of the greatest iron works in the world, particularly after the indefatigable Lady Charlotte Guest remarried in 1855. The Clarks lived at Dowlais House — demolished in the 1970's — which had been the Guest's, sharing their strong sense of social service in providing schools and hospitals.

Despite all this, George Clark found time to become an expert on archeology, military architecture, heraldry, and local history, with many publications to his name, particularly his work on the Glamorgan charters, and his indispensable and desirable book of 1886 on the family pedigrees of Glamorgan. He was High Sheriff in 1868.

FROM 1865, improvements and extensions were made at Talygarn, the Clarks spending more and more time there as it became more habitable, though it was not completed at the time of George's death in 1898. The clock tower was heightened, a completely new hall, drawing room and staircase were built.

Inside, the fittings were of fine quality, with splendid carved woodwork, particularly by the Italian Biraghi. There were painted ceilings from Venice, marble fireplaces from Verona, tiles from Naples, marquetry doors from Vicenza, needlework from Milan. The crossed C's of Clark are everywhere. Many of the ideas, as well as some actual woodwork, are Clark's, though Sir Henry Layard had a hand in the drawing room. Sir Henry dis-



covered Nineveh, was Lady Charlotte's cousin, and married her daughter Enid. Most amazing of all is that it is mostly still there, including original chandeliers, in excellent condition, though some is being meticulously restored by David Lewis of Cefnpennar. This, too, after almost 70 years as a convalescent home.

George's son, Godfrey Lewis Clark, completed Talygarn with the building of the east tower. He lived in the house with his family soon after his mother had died, and was there until 1920, four years before his own death. He was Sheriff in 1897, as was his son Wyndham Damer Clark in 1921, upon whose death in 1956, some of the family



portraits came back from their Berkeley Square home to Talygarn. Wyndham is survived by his son Jocelyn from his first marriage.

In 1922 the house, and 140 acres of the 1,200 acre estate, was bought for £20,000 by the South Wales Miners Federation, and opened in 1923 as a convalescent home, becoming a rehabilitation centre in 1943, and part of the NHS in 1951. There is still a strong link with the coal industry, but many patients are not now miners. There are resident and day patients and about 40 staff, headed by Mrs Fry at Talygarn and Adrian Jones at East Glamorgan Hospital.

The administrator for 14 years was Derrick Kingham, who showed me around and still lives in the old estate manager's house by the nine-acre lake. He remembers, when going to Talygarn first, the sense of tradition, like the carefully segregated Christmas dinners, and the memories of artists like Olive Gilbert and Paul Robeson visiting the small concert hall. Its period charms were used as a setting for a film a year or so ago.

George Clark was a keen horticulturist too, growing pineapples at Dowlais. He laid out fine gardens and trees at Talygarn and there are still 60 acres admirably kept up by Mr Bunbury, and his staff.

Let us hope for a healthy future for Talygarn. □



