

# 'TREWALLTER'

## A piece of Welsh heritage on loan

**O**NLY THE name has been changed to protect the Welshness — now Walterston-Fawr, a 16th century stone house at Walterston, near Llancarfan in the Vale of Glamorgan, which celebrated its 400th birthday this year, is named Trewallter — look at the current edition of the Ordnance Survey map if you don't believe it.

It has been the home for 18 years of Mrs Non Evans, former wife of BBC television film-maker John Hefin Evans. She lives there with their children, Dylan, (20), and Lowri, (18), and three dogs: two retrievers and a Jack Russell. A teacher at the Melin Gruffyd Welsh school at Whitchurch, Cardiff, she is a native Welsh speaker and comes from Blaenau Ffestiniog.

According to the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales, it is a "central lobby" Elizabethan house, but to Mrs Evans it is a part of her Welsh heritage that has been loaned to her for her lifetime.

And it has been her gladly accepted task to return it, meticulously, to as close as possible to what it was like all those hundreds of years ago.

Take for example, the massive front door which, like the rest of the house, was in a pretty poor shape when they bought the property. "One-third of the back door was in good order, and two-thirds of the front door," explained Mrs Evans. "So we took them both down and sent them to Cardiganshire, where they pulled them to pieces, took out the iron studs and rebuilt them into one door, using only the old wood. We had to block off the front door opening for about a year but it was worth it."

Then came the question of the door lock. "It's such an old Welsh house," says Mrs Evans. "But we live here and it's not a museum. We have got to live in the 20th century. We had a long discussion about whether or not to have a Yale lock put in the door; shall we, shan't we? Then, when we saw the massive key needed to open it we reluctantly decided to have a Yale. However, there is still a bung we can put in to cover it up."

The same dilemma arose when central heating was to be installed. "We had the flagstones lifted because we didn't want pipes all over the place.



**Denys Huddle**

The plumbers were very good — they put soot into the cement between the flagstones to colour it to make it match the others."

"It's a never-ending task, added Mrs Evans. "It's like the Severn Bridge, this house. You do something and something else has to be done."

The original mullion windows were in a bad state of repair and the Welsh Office experts wanted them taken out and replaced with modern replicas. Mrs Evans found a firm that would repair and remould the existing windows on site, because the original stone of which they were made was no longer available.

Trewallter is regarded as a "superior" kind of lobby-entry house. Unlike the half-timbered ones in Montgomeryshire the second fireplace does not back onto the first but is sited against a gable wall.

"When we came here there was a cast-iron Victorian range in the main

fireplace," said Mrs Evans. "One night John, was standing by the fire when the sill above the fireplace collapsed. We saw part of the huge beam that had been revealed and out came the pick-axe." It was another six months before the full glory of the stone fireplace, with its circular bread oven, was revealed.

It is not surprising that the introduction of coal fuel made such fireplaces a considerable risk and many either went up in smoke or were rebuilt in a mass material.

The house has 11 rooms, with two large sitting rooms and kitchen on the ground floor. The largest was once the hall or "lobby".

Although it seems Queen Elizabeth never slept there, Trewallter has had its famous visitors. "Tolo Morgannwg (inventor of the Gorsedd of Bards) who was a bit of a joker, lived at Fonmon, just around the corner," said Mrs Evans. "It was he that claimed Walters-ton, which once had some 16 homesteads, was started by Walter de Mapes, a Norman.

Today it is something of a forgotten village, with only three properties.

There is also a story that Oliver Cromwell visited the house during the Civil War, at the time of the Battle of St Fagans.

In the sitting room two marble window sills carry the inscription "Thomas Richard, 1729" "On our nearby farm there is a stone saying, 'Thomas Richard, peace be in this house' ", said Mrs Evans. "It's dated 1728 and we have just recently found his will. He died in 1729 and, a farmer, he left the house to his son. He was then in debt. Now, my theory is this — there are only two marble window sills in this room. The third is wood, and I feel sure it is because he ran out of money."

Mrs Evans is an inveterate collector — everything from four-poster beds, milk-maids yokes and wooden peat shovels to modern milk bottles. "I have been collecting for a long time," she said. "It's a sort of personal junk. I'm a terrible collector. I can't turn anything away. I made the lamps out of drain-pipes because any modern lamp looks wrong in this house because it should be candlelight." And amazingly attractive they are too.

The house also has a bewilderingly varied collection of pictures, ranging from Australian artist Sidney Nolan's depictions of outlaw Ned Kelly in his iron armour, to a large, colourful 19th century sampler.

As you leave, across the stone stile at the back, you catch a glimpse of Mrs Evans's latest acquisition — an old red telephone box in the garden. She has had it transported there from Pembroke-shire, and as soon as it is connected up will help her get rid of long-winded callers. "I shall tell them I have to go as I'm in a call-box," she said. □



