# Peter Bolton

The Wrexham Art Treasures Exhibition of 1876

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**Professor Joe Yates**: My name is Professor Joe Yates, and I'm the Vice Chancellor of Wrexham University and I just wanted to say, croeso, welcome to our university and to this research talk tonight.

Peter was a Senior Lecturer in History here at the University for almost twenty years, covering topics from the Roman period though to the Cold War and he’s currently a Senior Student Advisor in our Inclusion Services. He's keenly interested in Welsh history, especially the often-neglected history of the local area and the role of culture throughout the ages. Peter has previously been nominated for Royal Historical Society Awards and his work on the Guilds of Chester was published in the prestigious regional journal.

Peter's research on Wrexham's Art Treasures Exhibition of 1876 looked at the motives behind the ambitious event, largely through analysis of its main organisers and contributors and tonight, Peter will talk us through the scope of the cultural artefacts on show and the reaction to the event and its relative successes.

So, without further ado, I'll introduce Peter.

**Peter Bolton:** Thank you, Joe. Can everybody hear me first of all? Yeah. Thanks very much for that introduction, lovely introduction, and thanks everybody for coming. Nice to see so many people here. You do realise Jason Donovan's next month, don't you? Because you're going to be disappointed otherwise.

Culture of a different type tonight really. I want to talk a little bit about this grand cultural event that came to Wrexham in 1876 and that is the art treasures exhibition. This took place between July and November of that year and I think despite its significance, this is what I think anyway, despite its significance, not much has really been done on it. So, I want to share some of my research on this event and tell the story of it really, I suppose but also, I want to think about who was behind the event, some of the motives for the event and whether it was a success. Did they succeed in their ambitions? I'm also interested in the way in which this event of 1876 really tapped into some quite important themes, historical themes that we see in Britain in this period, particularly the use of art and culture to demonstrate improvement and elevation. That's particularly true in the towns and cities in northern Britain in particular, and in northwest Britain. Places that are usually better known for industry and so I want to talk a little bit about that and also, I want to think a little bit about the sort of class relations, what the art treasures exhibition of 1876 can tell us, I suppose, about the relationship between the classes in that period.

Before we get to that though, a little bit of context and here I get to use the clicker. A little bit of context, what was Wrexham like by the late 19th century? Well, by that time, Wrexham was a town of around about 10,000 people, so comfortably the largest town in the region. Its prosperity, such as it was, had been built on the cloth trade, the leather trade and other trades too. But its prosperity really lay in its location because it was able to benefit from trade routes from Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire and Shropshire. By the 19th century, things were starting to change. The Industrial Revolution, of course, changed everything, and Wrexham's own trading identity was changing too.

So, by the 19th century, especially in the late 19th century, we start to see Wrexham's trading identity based more around coal, iron, later on steel, and of course, the all-important brewing industry. In 1876, in the year that we're interested in Wrexham was very much an improving town and that word improvement was really a byword for the Victorian era and we could say that Wrexham was very much an improving town. We see this in all sorts of ways in 1876 itself. It was in that year that the Football Association of Wales was formed in Wrexham in the Wynnstay Arms on Wrexham's high street. 1876 was also the year in which trams were introduced into Wrexham to connect the wider communities. 1876 was also the year the Eisteddfod visited Wrexham for the first time. So, a nice bit of circularity there with it visiting again this year.

It would appear that Wrexham was very much on the up, a typical improving town. However, you wouldn't necessarily know that from the national and international press that was in the town in that year. As I work in the inclusion department now, I'm going to read out all the slides but that does mean I've got to put my glasses on. So, this is a couple of comments from the Melbourne Argus, Wrexham is:

“… *a cold, flat, grey, mean looking town where one is received with total apathy*”

The Spectator:

*“…an ugly and uninteresting place. Flat, dull, dirty, and crowded with people who are unbeautiful exceedingly.”*

Well, not a very flattering portrait, and really contradicting what I've just been saying of Wrexham as an improving town. However, slightly ironic too, because the reason that these commentators from far and wide were actually in Wrexham was to celebrate another sign of that improvement, which was the art treasures exhibition. We'll come back to these commentators later on, but I want to turn now to the actual art treasures and just think a little bit about its beginnings, I suppose.

So really the idea for an art treasures exhibition, it really came out of the Eisteddfod, which was to visit Wrexham in August of 1876 and some members of the organising committee for the Eisteddfod, certain prominent gentlemen, were hugely disdainful of the art exhibition that was planned as part of the Eisteddfod and which is a common part of the Eisteddfod even today. They determined that they would put on a better show, but crucially, this show, although it would run around about the same time as the Eisteddfod, it would run for longer, but crucially, it would also be housed in a separate part of town and in a separate building. It would be a completely separate event from the Eisteddfod and the man behind it really, and the person who dominates the sources is this chap here, William Cornwallis West or Major William Cornwallis West, to give him his title. William Cornwallis West was, I suppose in some ways, a typical aristocrat born into an upper-class family with links to Denbighshire and also lands in Hampshire. Later on, through marriage, he would also have links to the Duke of Westminster and even Winston Churchill's family. In 1876 though, he was the Lord Lieutenant of Denbighshire and he was situated in Ruthin Castle. He would also serve as a justice of the peace for Denbighshire and Hampshire. He would also be a Colonel in the fourth Battalion, the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and in 1885 he would become, like his father before him, the MP, the Liberal MP for Denbighshire West. I suppose in some ways this is a typical CV for an aristocrat of this period, someone who is very much a pillar of the aristocratic community. More importantly and more pertinently, though, I think for our purposes, William Cornwallis West was also, or at least he considered himself to be an art connoisseur, someone who was very interested in art. He was born in Florence. Strangely enough, he was born in Florence, and he visited the city several times during his life as well. He learned to paint there, he would buy art from there as well, he had a dealer in Florence too, so he was very confident in his ability to put on a good show and as I say, he's the person who would dominate the sources.

What's important as well are his contacts, his contacts and his influence, without which the art treasures exhibition probably would never have happened. We get a glimpse, I suppose, of these contacts and this influence through the art treasures exhibition catalogue, which was actually put together by the superintendent of the art treasures exhibition, a chap called William Chaffers who worked for the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria and Albert Museum. This is a this is a really good source, this is a source I used a lot in my research, and it's a really interesting source in that you've got quite a lot of detail about the artefacts, the paintings and the artefacts themselves that were on display, over 3000 of them. You've also got some nice lists and all historians love lists, don't they? You've got some nice lists of people involved in the exhibition. So here we see one page of a list of guarantors, these were the people who provided money to get the art treasures exhibition underway. We also have reference to the people who contributed the works of art, and the objects, the artefacts as well, and all sorts of other things too. So, it's a really a really important source and if you're interested, this is available now online. When I was doing my research, for this not for this talk, for the article that I wrote on this a while back. When I was doing my research, I had to work from a paper copy of this, and about a month after my paper was published, this thing was put online, which was hugely disappointing. But, having said that, this was a sort of second edition, so it is slightly different from the one I was working on, buy anyway. This is also useful, this source, because it also, to some extent, allows us to see what the art treasures exhibition would have looked like. This is a plan that was reproduced in the Wrexham Advertiser, but originally this had appeared in the catalogue that we were just looking at. This is a schematic basically of the purpose-built exhibition hall because the organising committee looked at various ways of housing the art treasures exhibition. There was even this crazy idea to cover over a couple of the uncovered markets and build a bridge between them and all these other strange things, but in the end, what they decided to do, they decided to build a purpose-built exhibition hall in the centre of Wrexham. This cost in the region of £4,000, or about £300,000 in today's money, and it was only ever intended to be a temporary structure, so quite a lot of money for a temporary structure. It shouldn't surprise us, though, that the committee went down this route, this temporary structure, because this is this is actually something of a trend ever since the Great exhibition of 1851 in London, in the Crystal Palace, which itself was supposed to be a temporary structure. Other towns and cities up and down Britain had followed this same pattern, so Wrexham wasn't any different in that respects, and this was typical of this Victorian desire to show improvements. It was also typical of the idea, the desire to show off, I think, as well, and especially in industrial towns like Wrexham, to show that there was more to them than just industry. As one commentator said that there was more to them than just the miserable accumulation of wealth, there was culture as well, and this is a sign of that, this is what you need to encourage that culture.

Now, although sadly the exhibition hall was demolished shortly after the exhibition finished. We do have a lasting reminder through the entrance way, which was a separate building and anyone who's familiar with Wrexham, I'm sure, will be familiar with Argyle Arch. This was the entrance way into the art Treasures exhibition and we see some pictures of it here that I took not so long ago with the ubiquitous Amazon delivery van in one of them, but this is this would have been the main entrance we can see here. So, you would have come through on through Hope Street, the main street, you would have got in through the archway there and then you would have gone, you likely would have gone through, you would have gone into one of these two museums here on either side. If we look on these modern images, we can see the doorways that would have led on to those museums which are shops today, and as some of you will know, this this Argyle arch, the buildings around it, which are called the Westminster Buildings, they were owned by a Scottish engineer called William Lowe. William Lowe famously was the Channel Tunnel pioneer, he came up with the idea of the Channel Tunnel in the 19th century, and a lot of people got very excited about this idea, Queen Victoria included, until the government decided it might be a way for the French to invade, so they sort of knocked it on the head. But William Lowe allowed the archway and the land behind it, which belonged to him as well, to be used for the exhibition hall. So, the archway is the entrance and the exhibition hall beyond. So, if we just go back to the image here, you can see, you would have come in through the archway, you would have gone into one of these museums or both of them at one point. The museums themselves would have housed Oriental antiquities that were said to be remarkable, in fact, so good that the Tsar of Russia himself wanted to loan them. I don't know how true that is, but that was supposedly the case. After that, you would have gone into the entrance hall here, and again, quite interesting to see that, you know, you've got a reading room, a lavatory, which is a big thing, of course. But you also would have had a dining room, a buffet room here, as well as a second-class refreshment room and a first-class dining room. So again, that just sort of hints, I suppose, at the class structures at the time and you would have walked along this entranceway here, this covered entrance, and this would have been festooned with statuary with busts, with plates, with all sorts of other things to, but this would have merely been an hors d’oeuvre, a starter to the main course, which would have been housed in the art gallery itself.

We can see the main art gallery. This is where the most important works of art would have been housed. The most important artefacts would have been housed as well. We can see the art gallery surrounded by the industrial annexe, and we're fortunate in that we have an image of the opening ceremony and I've made this a slightly different colour because I was trying to be inclusive because I do work in inclusion department you know, but it's come out a little bit garish. So, I do apologise for that. But we have an image here of the opening ceremony that shows us a little bit of what the exhibition hall would have looked like. This is the opening ceremony, 22nd of July 1876, and this was reproduced in the Illustrated London News and we can see here these cabinets which is stuffed full of artefacts going all the way back to the back wall on either side. We can also see if we look closely, we can see on the back walls all these paintings, all grouped together under the names of the artists, again on both sides and all the way along the side and to the back of the hall. Also, you might just about be able to make out this huge organ at the back, 2,500 pipes no less and this again was purpose built for the for the exhibition because William Cole Wallace West, he was very keen that the exhibition wasn't just about things you look at, it was also about things you heard. He thought this would be a bit of a money spinner because he talked about the national instinct of the Welsh for music, they're bound to come to the choral concerts and various other things. We can see at the front we can see Cornwallis West here at the front, alongside the Duke and Duchess of Westminster, who were the patrons, the duke was the president of the art treasures and Cornwallis West here. Those speeches are reproduced in great detail in the newsprint and basically what they're doing here is they're telling this very fashionable group of people, all of whom would have paid to be at the opening ceremony, they're telling them about the art treasures, about the motives behind it.

It's those motives now I just want to turn to. So, we'll move on to the motives now. As you sift through the sources, it becomes apparent that there are a number of motives behind the art treasures exhibition, some are quite easy to say, some a little bit more opaque and would need a little bit more analysis. The main objective, though, something that is continually referred to by the operating committee was the desire to educate and improve the working classes. The art treasures exhibition was designed to bring culture to the masses, basically. Affording them the rare opportunity to engage with high culture. Now, we might question this motive, we might question this as a reason, but in fact, this was something of a preoccupation amongst polite society and the aristocracy in Britain in the 19th century. This desire to almost ‘civilise’ the working classes, working classes who were often parodied as unreliable, as immoral, as depraved in some way. As William Cook Taylor put it “*Excluded chiefly by class from nobler pleasures, the worker is driven to seek the pleasures of gin and brandy, to find exercise in the impure dreams of intoxication and the miserable distractions of debauchery”.* This was a common refrain, because at the end of the day, Britain's prosperity rested upon the working classes and for a lot of well-to-do folk, these working classes weren’t behaving in a very moral way, so they thought anyway. So, that was the ostensible reason to elevate and educate the working classes, which is something I'll come back to.

I think a case can also be made in the art treasures exhibition, I think a case can be made when it comes to motives for putting on an exhibition that also appealed to Welsh identity and it's true to say that there were lots of these exhibitions in Britain since 1851, since the Great Exhibition. There were lots of these exhibitions, and they were all perhaps much of a muchness. What the 1876 organisers wanted, they wanted something that was unique. They wanted something that put Wrexham on the map, that showed Wrexham's confidence, its improvement. One way they did this was by appealing to Welsh identity, two rather hazy notions, I suppose, of Welsh identity, Welsh history, Welsh myth and folklore. And we see this in a number of the exhibits in 1876 for example, if we think about some of the manuscripts that were on show, we have the manuscripts that today make up the Peniarth Collection in the National Library of Wales. So, we have the Black Book of Carmarthen, which was reckoned to be the first writings in Welsh. We have the poems of Taliesin, the first poetry in Welsh, and much else besides. In terms of art as well, we also have a healthy representation from Welsh artists, and probably the most important was Richard Wilson.

The 18th century Welsh artist who even in his time became pretty significant. Richard Wilson was born in Powys, he spent a lot of time in Italy and before moving and finally dying near Mold. The superintendent of the art treasures, William Chaffers, who put the catalogue together, he really wanted to bring together Richard Wilson's art in Wrexham. What we must remember is that the idea that you can just walk into an art gallery and see these things, that really wasn't an option, especially in a place like Wrexham. In London, to a large extent, yes, but not outside of London. William Chaffers wanted to bring together Richard Wilson's works of art and he wanted to do that because he wanted to inform people, to educate people about the way in which landscape art had evolved, because Richard Wilson is often seen as a revolutionary when it comes to landscape art. So, in the art treasures exhibition and in the catalogue, there are no fewer than 19 works of art attributed to Richard Wilson and I've just picked out three here just to demonstrate this appeal to sort of Welsh identity to Welsh myth, to Welsh folklore, and we can see from these images here places that would have been familiar to many people from Wrexham and the border area. We have Dinas Bran from Llangollen which was contributed by Sir Watkin Williams Wynn. We have the River Dee near Eaton Hall from the dean of Chester and we have the view near Wynnstay. When we look at these, you know, it doesn't really look much like north east Wales, does it? But, you know, there's a real sort of sense of romanticism, there's a real bucolic charm to these things, I suppose, but there's also a sense of familiarity I imagine too. What William Chaffers, the superintendent is trying to do, he's trying to create a visual narrative that is both wondrous but also seemingly familiar and, you know, you look at this and there is that sense of wonder. I mean, when we look at, for example, the view near Wynnstay you could equally be in the Bay of Naples with Vesuvius in the background couldn't you I think there. Again, he's creating something that is wondrous. I suppose he's tapping into the sort of mystery and romanticism of Wales and in fact Richard Wilson, that was part of what he was known for, which is really bringing Wales to the people, you know, making Wales visible through art. I suppose as the viewer you are being seduced by this art and seduced into a lesson on landscape art, whether you realise it or not. Albeit in an idealised Welsh landscape, all the better for your elevation, for your education, and again, it comes back to that desire that the operating committee have.

I should say methodologically, it was when I was putting this talk together, I was trying to work out which pieces to show, and I was going to show The Summit of Cader Idris, the famous Wilson painting which was displayed and attributed to Wilson in 1876. But it turned out actually that wasn't a Wilson. It was one of his, somebody who worked for Richard Wilson, so I had to track these down and make sure they were definitely on display, because they're not always very well explained in the in the catalogue or very well described. So, for example, Dinas Bran from Llangollen, which is what it's known by now, was just described as Llangollen Bridge. The view of Wynnstay near the seat of so Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, which is what it's officially known as now was just described as the Vale of Llangollen. So, it took some tracking down, but I've got to say, the Paul Mellon Centre in London which has got excellent records of Richard Wilson, was able to confirm that all of these paintings did indeed appear in 1876. And again, you know, contribute to this this sort of motive of embracing a Welsh identity, all the better for the education and elevation of the people visiting.

We see it with some artefacts too, this was one of the more significant artefacts on display. This is the Caergwrle Cup from about 1200 BCE and the descriptions here as they appeared in the catalogue, a “…*bowl or a wooden vessel, elaborately carved and richly inlaid on the exterior, with thin gold in various patterns, beautifully tooled. The principal ornamentation consists of zigzag parallel lines and deep indented borders, similar in this respect to the golden inlets which have been which have on several occasions been found in Ireland”.* And again, this is an artefact that, according to the press anyway, drew a lot of attention from the people visiting. This was another item of wonder, but also a local item too. This was discovered in Caergwrle in 1823. It was reckoned to be unique in that it depicted, although it's not easy to see from this, but it depicted a boat. It was a votive offering, so it was basically cast into the river and it depicted a boat all in gold and I think what's significant about this, again, coming back to that point about the uniqueness of this exhibition, is that this really reflected the fact that this exhibition, it wasn't this sort of parochial event because this this item and a lots of other things too, they really reflected the fact that this was a sophisticated land back almost 3000 years. Well, 3000 years in 1876, you know, this is the time of myth and history. This is the time of the Trojan War and, you know, it really demonstrates the fact that this exhibition was trying to do something unique. It was trying to tap into that sort of sense of the land, of Welsh consciousness and Welsh identity, of those connections that went back many thousands of years in this case. It also reflects the land's relationship with trade. Further trading ports in Ireland, and also in places like Cornwall and Kent where much of the gold came from.

We see it too, just carry on this theme of Welsh identity, we see it too, with another item which I couldn't find a picture of. This is *“the precious pebble of Owain ap Gruffydd, Prince and sovereign of all Wales. This pebble has been preserved ever since his time in the families of Rhewaedog and Rhiwlas, and before the death of the head of the family, the crack in the pebble is said to widen perceptibly”.* I mean, that's real sort of King Arthur stuff, isn't it? This is Owain ap Gruffydd or Owain Gwynedd, as he's often known. Owain ap Gruffydd who died in 1170, Owain ap Gruffydd, he was the original king in the north. He united Gwynedd against the English king Henry the Second and died a natural death, which was quite unusual at the time. You know this precious pebble, this sort of heirloom was again, it was situated in the part of the exhibition that had the Egyptian mummies as well but apparently this was all people wanted to see, this pebble of Owain ap Gruffydd, the king in the north, the king of North Wales. Interestingly, too, this was contributed by Richard Lloyd Price, who also introduced sheepdog trials into Wales, so there you go not only a creator of history, as well as a custodian of history.

So, I think in line with the operating committee's desire to educate the masses, we also see this deliberate evocation of Welsh history, of Welsh myth and legend. The better to engage the public, the better to educate the public and also, I think, to provide that sense of belonging and uniqueness, which you don't really see in other exhibitions, not so much anyway. This was summed up, this desire for Welsh identity, this was summed up by a writer for the fields magazine who said “*they are sharp enough*”, this is the organising committee, “*they are sharp enough to see that this Welsh emphasis helps to preserve the national character and keep before the world*, *and especially England, the fact that they were once a separate people and have yet traditions of past greatness”.*  Once a separate people, anyway, but it sort of sums up that appeal to Welsh identity that others were obviously able to see.

I want to move on. I think when considering motives, it would be remiss of me to not mention the fact that, you know, a lot of people suggested that the art treasures exhibition was got up in a political style. It was done for political reasons, a great networking event, a bit like we had before you came in here, and I think, you know, there's undoubtedly some truth to that. You know, Cornwallis West himself was a liberal, or he would become a Liberal MP. We have the grand old man, William Gladstone, four times Liberal MP, he was involved in the art treasures, he was a guarantor, he also provided some artefacts for it. The Duke of Westminster, who was the president, he was also a Liberal MP and later Liberal peer. We have Lord Clarence Paget, the son of the Marquess of Anglesey who was a Liberal MP from Kent. We have Lord Vivian, who was a Liberal MP from Cornwall, and we have people like Philip Henry Howard, who was a really important contributor, who was connected to the Duke of Norfolk, the Dukes of Norfolk, who were who were really staunch Liberal supporters at this time. But Cornwallis West would laugh off these suggestions. He would laugh off what he called the vials of animosity that have been poured on my head. He would say that the art treasures was done for a pure purpose. It was done to elevate and to educate the working classes.

And that brings me to my final section. Believe it or not, and that is, did he succeed? Was it a success? Was the art treasures a success? Well, I suppose that depends how we measure success. There are all sorts of ways of measuring success of course. One way, one obvious way, is by looking at the finances. Was the art treasures exhibition a financial success? Well, the answer to that was a resounding no. The art treasures exhibition made a huge loss, £6,500 pounds or half a million in today's money. Why? There were lots of reasons put forward as to why it made such a financial loss, but undoubtedly the main reason that Cornwallis West kept coming back to was because the working classes did not patronise it enough. Not enough people visited from the masses, basically, they were to blame and he actually said allowance was not made for the comparatively barren soil in which the exhibition was planted. But actually, if you look at the if you look at the detail here, not only is that probably slightly incorrect, it's probably not true and it's certainly not the only reason. Another reason, I think a more compelling reason might be the fact that there was a great deal of overspend on the exhibition. For example, I've already mentioned nearly £4,000 spent on the erection of the exhibition hall and the budget for this was £2,500 pounds, but actually because Cornwallis West wanted a great big organ which hadn't been in the original plans, they had to change the shape of it, and that cost a lot more money. There were also problems with contracts. There was also a lot of money paid to William Chaffers the superintendent, £465, an enormous sum of money, as well as £54 for his living expenses, which was more than all of the rest of the organising committee put together. we can look at lots of other things, too. The money that was spent on the grand concerts £729. The money that was spent on the band £477. We can see also that £514 was spent on the glass cases to house the artefacts, and then they were sold after the exhibition for just £149, so it seems like there's actually quite a lot of financial mismanagement going on here and also, that claim that the people didn't support it enough, also we might take issue with that. If we look at this figure here, £3,195, that is the money taken in from the ticket receipts and the tickets would have cost between 6p and a shilling, depending on what time of the day you went. And even if we take the sort of medium ticket price and divide it by that, without going into all the mathematics now, we get to a figure of about 110,000 people who visited the exhibition in total. Cornwallis West, though, would claim that only 50,000 people visited and we might wonder why he did this, why he played down the numbers. Well, because it allowed him to weaponize this narrative of the working classes having let them down and he basically used this in his posh gatherings, which he seems to do a lot of in 1877, to raise money to pay off the debt, which eventually he does. So, we might suggest that actually in in terms of visitor numbers, it was a success if not financially. But finally, was it a cultural success? Because at the end of the day, that's what Cornwallis West wanted, he wanted a cultural event. Well, again, that's tricky to say because it depends on how we define culture. If we think of culture possibly in the same way that the Victorians would have thought of culture, which was the engagement in art and philosophy that elevates the minds, that brings improvements and progress. Then perhaps we can say it was a resounding success. We've already seen some examples of important Welsh culture but you can add to that all sorts of other things too and I've included these three here just because they're probably the most famous, but items that really reflect Britain's turbulent history often, but items of real significance. So, we have the gold rosary and crucifix of Mary Queen of Scots, presented by the Pope to Queen Mary and worn by her at her execution. I couldn't get a copyright free image of the crucifix etc. so I just got a picture of Mary and here she is wearing the rosary and the crucifix. That was on display in 1876. We also have, sticking with this theme, we also have the watch given by Charles I to Mr Herbert when going to the place of execution. Charles I was executed in the mid-17th century, this is the watch that he gave up at his execution. Finally, we have the Grace Cup of St. Thomas à Becket who was murdered on the orders of Henry II in 1170, surmounted by a figure of St. Michael and the dragon. This grace cup is the cup that would have been passed around the table when Grace was being said. It is significant in its own right, of course, and its connection, but also because there were later, much later, Renaissance additions to it that were that really represented a bit of a revolution in British metalwork at that time. So really significant items, I suppose and items which demonstrate the art treasures exhibition was in some ways unique. It wasn't this local parochial exhibition. There were elements of that, but there was much more to it than that.

You know, on top of that, you know, providing a more international feel we have all sorts of art and artefacts from across Europe. Over 200 paintings attributed to the old Masters, including Rubens, Van Dyck, Titian, Tintoretto, Raphael, Velasquez, Canaletto and many more. We also have a splash of modernity, with the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood also well-represented here. So, to our eyes, perhaps, and perhaps to the visitors’ eyes, this would have been seen as a cultural success. But I'm going to end by thinking about what do the critics think. What did the critics think about it? Well, it's hard to get an unbiased opinion from the local press because they're overwhelmingly in favour of Cornwallis West and his friends, but we're going to go back to the sources that we started with, and this is from the Melbourne Argus; “*There is an absolute absence of vulgarity, none of the brand new frivolities and cheap bibelots which give to ordinary exhibitions the air of the Soho and Baker Street bazaars. Here one is in the best of good company. No mediocrity has been admitted”.* Bibelots, means knickknacks, I didn't know that either, but it's a French word, I think we should bring it back. But that's quite an interesting point, because by this time, a lot of exhibitions were basically glorified antique markets. The point here is that Wrexham's wasn't. It did have things on sale, but most of the stuff was there for its cultural and historical value and we end, I think, fittingly, with The Spectator: “*in truth, the pitches, though they are the most salient charm of this exhibition, are not it’s rarest features… the things which illustrate the past and help us to realise the links between the lies that are not, and the lies that are, the things that represent the ages and the races of men, hereditary jewels taken out of the strong rooms and the caskets where they dwell unseen in ordinary times. These are the more important attractions which this unique and adventurous exhibition has to offer”.* So again, praise indeed. I think that line there really sums it up, “*the links between the lives that are not and the lives that are*” really sums it up. At the start of the evening, I talked a little bit about my reasons for this talk and for wanting to do this talk and there are lots of reasons, but one of them, I think, was the overarching, one overarching reason really, was the importance of history. I think especially the importance of local histories that connect us, I think, through the ages by establishing precedents and helping, I think, to form our collective identities in all sorts of little ways. If we look at Wrexham today, we've got the return of the Eisteddfod this year of course, we've got the new bid for the City of Culture, we've got the opening up of Tŷ Pawb, we've got the activity, of course, surrounding the football ground that has shone an international spotlight on Wrexham. We can spot these continuities. We can spot these links between the past and the present. We can celebrate a history of cultural traditions that still, 150 years later, bind us together.

So, thank you very much to all these organisations who helped me put this talk together. Thank you to the Research team and my colleagues in inclusion. Thank you to my long-time colleague, Dr Katherine Ellis, who had the misfortune to sit through the first reading of this talk and as usual, made many valuable contributions, and thank you to all of you for coming tonight. I understand that this is a record in terms of tickets sold, so thank you for giving up your time and showing that you two are history makers. So, thank you very much.