

Beauty – that strange Necessity

Sir Clough Williams-Ellis; the inspiration for CPRW

As a lifelong campaigner for the environment Clough was often obliged to write pessimistic prose. However, he was not at heart a pessimist, in fact he was quite the opposite. Without a good deal of optimism he would not have achieved all that he did during his career. He believed in the powers of persuasion and felt if only he could set a good enough example others might follow. For Clough the purpose of the world was to create artists and their purpose was to create beauty through their art. His speeches, writings and buildings were all part of his campaign for seemly development and architectural good manners. He strove to stem the tide of destruction he saw rising around him throughout his long life and in two devastating world wars. There were many times when he no doubt felt he was fighting a losing battle.

But the optimistic moments always shone through eventually, especially in his later years when he did at last feel the tide of wanton destruction was ebbing. In his autobiography, *Architect*

Errant (1971), he wrote:

"All my adult life I have been acutely conscious of my country's visual impact - often despairingly...For half a century and more I had been crying havoc and chanting Milton's dirge : 'Farewell happy fields where joy for ever dwells, hail horrors', as though we were already doomed... Now I am not so sure. I almost feel that we have perhaps at long last set a new course away from crass barbarity and may even yet lead the world towards a livelier respect for the setting and background of our life on earth which could yet be made so beautiful if we cared to have it so. Quite suddenly, in short, I am (at this moment) no longer a despairful Jeremiah but a-bubble with new-found hope."

Clough was of course a founder member, past Chairman and lifelong supporter of CPRW and I'm sure he would be proud of its many achievements and glad that it continues to campaign for the preservation of rural Wales.

Robin Llywelyn May 2008



Clough Williams-Ellis talking with Frank Lloyd Wright outside the Town Hall in Portmeirion 1956

A man of vision

Long before most people were thinking in terms of an endangered environment in Wales, Sir Clough Williams-Ellis was pressing for its safeguarding and warning of the perils which would beset it. It is hardly surprising therefore that he was one of a small group of visionaries responsible for establishing CPRW, 80 years ago in 1928.

"His lifelong concern was with architecture, landscape design, the protection of rural Wales and conservation generally, and he strove at Portmeirion and elsewhere to give some of his ideas physical expression. He fought for Beauty - that strange Necessity."

So reads the note left by CPRW's inspirational father figure, the man who even had the foresight to write his own obituary.

In the Marquis of Anglesey's tribute to Sir Clough Williams-Ellis in the 1978 edition of CPRW News, he reminds us that Sir Clough probably did more in his time than any other, for the great causes which were his lifelong concern.

"His chief weapons were polemical and preceptory. He



The Hotel Portmeirion from the Loggia circa 1928